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THE WING OF AZRAEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF "WHOM NATURE LEADETH," "ONE THAT WINS," ETC., ETC.

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THE WING OF AZRAEL

BY

MONA CAIRD

AUTHOR OF "WHOM NATURE LEADETH," "ONE THAT WINS," ETC.

"Amidst the sunshine of a cloudless day
A shadow falls—the Wing of Azrael;
Though utterly the shadow pass away,
The doom must come that therewith earthward fell."

William Sharp.

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Mona Caird

TO

Elizabeth A. Sharp

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED, WITH GRATEFUL

AND ADMIRING AFFECTION.

PREFACE.

MUCH has been said for and against the writing of "novels with a purpose."

As well might one argue for and against the finding of the Philosopher's Stone.

The work of fiction whose motive is not the faithful description of an impression from without, but the illustration of a thesis—though that thesis be the corner-stone of Truth itself—has adopted the form of the novel for the purposes of an essay, and has no real right to the name. So long as there is true consistency in the actions and thoughts of the characters, so long as they act and think because circumstances and innate impulse leave them no alternative, they cannot be fitted into exact correspondence with any view, or made into the advocate of any cause. If the author preserves his literary fidelity, rebellion among the actors inevitably springs up. Far from being puppets, as they are so often erroneously called, they are creatures with a will and a stubborn personality, who often drive the stage-manager to the brink of despair; and as for being ready to "point a moral and adorn a tale" at his bidding, they would sooner throw up their parts and leave him alone on the deserted stage, to lament his own obstinacy and their insubordination!

Human affairs are too complex, motives too many and too subtle, to allow a small group of persons to become the exponents of a general principle, however true. An argument founded upon this narrow basis would be without value though it were urged with the eloquence of a Demosthenes.

Certain selected aspects of a truth may be—indeed must be—presented to the reader with insistence, for the impressions made upon a mind by the facts of life depend upon the nature of that mind, which urges emotionally upon the neutral vision one fact rather than another, and thus ends in producing a more or less selective composition and not a photograph.

But this process—entirely purposeless—takes place in the mind of

every one though he be as innocent as a babe of any tendency to weak romances, the most strictly matter-of-fact person being indeed the arch offender, as regards deviation from the centre of general truth.

His own faculties and prejudice, in this case, play the artist, selecting images of reality which group themselves after a certain inevitable fashion; and these represent for him what he is pleased to call "real life," with its "morals" and its "lessons," precisely corresponding, not to existence itself, but to the judgment and the temper of the unconscious dramatist.

"The eye only sees that which brings with it the power of seeing," whether "the eye" belong to one who describes his impression, or to him who allows it to be written secretly on his heart.

For in the heart of every man lies a recorded drama, sternly without purpose, yet more impressive and inevitable in its teachings than the most purposeful novel ever written.

To transcribe this invisible work so that the impress becomes revealed is to write a novel, good, bad, or indifferent, as the case may be, but a novel *par excellence* and not an essay.

The writer of fiction has to present, as best he may, a real impression made upon him, including the effect of such impulse to the imagination as it may have given, and of all the art—if art there be—or exercise of fancy by which the record is faithfully conveyed to the minds of others.

To reveal the image with so much skill that the vividness of the representation is hardly less than that of the original, is to write a novel well, though even yet the image itself may not be of sufficient interest to make its revelation of extreme value.

These are—according to my view—the conditions of the novel: first, of its claim to the title at all; secondly, of its merits, and thirdly, of its greatness, which implies the fulfilment of the other two requirements, while demanding also that the impression recorded shall be fine enough and striking enough to appeal to those sympathies in human nature which are most noble and most generous, as well as to that mysterious sense of proportion and beauty which holds relation to the suppressed and ill-treated but ever-present poetic instincts of mankind.

I have described these unattained ideals of the art of fiction, in order to show as convincingly as possible that, however much this book may be thought to deal with the question which has been recently so much discussed, there is no intention on the writer's part to make it serve a polemical purpose, or to advocate a cause.

Its object is not to convert or to convince, but to *represent*. However much it fails, that is its aim.

If anywhere temptation is yielded to and the action is dragged out of its course in order to serve an opinion of my own; if anywhere, for for that object, a character is made to think or to speak inconsistently with himself and his surroundings, therein must be recognized my want of skill, not my deliberate intention; the failure of my design, not its fulfilment.

MONA CAIRD.

HAMPSTEAD, *March* 2, 1889.

THE WING OF AZRAEL.

CHAPTER I.

MIST.

THE great stable-yard clock was slowly striking the hour—midnight. Over the park hung a white and stealthy mist, touched by white and stealthy moonlight. Great elm-trees loomed through it heavy and still: they seemed to be waiting for something that never came.

The mist was thick, but one could see through it a large white house with innumerable majestic windows, very broad and very high. Even in this dim light it was evident that everything was falling into decay. Grass grew in the shrubberies, and weeds in the gravel-paths; it was a melancholy, forsaken old place, closed in, and silent as the grave. The house stood hushed in the moonlight, with blinds drawn, windows closed,—all but one blind and one window on the first floor, on that side of the house which faced the garden, and beyond it a steep avenue of elm-trees.

At that open window a small figure was kneeling: a dark-haired little girl, who leant her elbows on the sill and gazed up the mystic avenue. The line of trees led the eye to the top of the hill, and there ending, created an unsatisfied longing to see over the other side. The child peered forth eagerly into the still, passionless mystery of the night. Throngs of bewildering thoughts were stirring the little soul to its depths: —what was it, and whence this strange world that does NOT come to an end at the top of the avenue, at the boundary of the park?—this world that goes on and on, field after field, till it comes to the sea, and then goes on and on again, wave after wave, till it comes once more to the land, and then——? then the realms of the air, and the great cloud-regions, and beyond these—Nothing, a great all-embracing Nothing that *will* not stop, that goes on and on, and still on, till the brain reels at the thought of it—but it does not stop then; it never stops, or would stop, or could stop, even when God sounded

the last trumpet and the worlds shrivelled up in the flames on the Judgment Day—how, even then, could it stop?

Could God Himself order that there should not be that great thought-confounding Emptiness? The child shuddered at the impious doubt, but her perplexed little mind staggered under the weight of the questions that came tumbling over one another in their haste.

The mystery of her own existence;—that was a terrible perplexity to the little metaphysician. Was this being, this *self* a reality in the strange, cold region of Nothingness? Was anything real and actual, or was it all a mistake, a shadow, a mist which would presently melt again into the void?

Yet if there were no reality, whence these thoughts? The child touched herself tentatively. Yes, she was, she *must* be real; a separate being called Viola Sedley,—with thoughts of her own, entirely her own, whom nobody in all this big world quite knew. *Viola Sedley;*—she repeated the name over and over to herself, as if to gain some clearer conception of her position in relation to the universe, but the arbitrary name only deepened the sense of mystery. Am *I*, this thought and feeling, Viola Sedley? Will the thought that I shall think, and the feeling that I shall feel to-morrow, be Viola Sedley too? It seemed awful to the child to be walking in the midst of "eternal verities" without knowing them; to be plunged in Infinite Nothingness and not understand if it would some day swallow us up, or if we should be rescued by the living Thought that seemed to have so true an existence. How had Thought prevailed against that Nothingness, risen out of its heart, if it were not some real thing stronger than all?

Viola could not have expressed these questions in words; but her ideas, preceding language (though so intimately related to it), stretched out into regions where she could find no answer, and where no answer was to be found.

Conceptions of God, Nature, Destiny, were running riot in the child's consciousness, her strict religious training raising questions without giving solutions, and torturing her with a sense of inconsistency demanding double-faced belief. The doctrine of eternal punishment had already begun to haunt this lonely child with its terrors. From long association, the gloom of the great park and the giant trees seemed to her to speak warningly of what was to come. The place was full of voices and of symbols. The elm avenue that led to the outer world beyond the park, the world where there was sunshine and a wide horizon, strong winds and liberty. Here at home a belt of dark trees shut out the far-away skies, here one seldom felt the open winds; it was stagnant and eventless. To go up that avenue and away into the world had been one of Viola's most passionate longings from her earliest childhood. From the summit one could catch a glimpse of the sea, the wonderful sea that spoke and sang all the year long, in winter and summer, through the warm days and

through all the long dark nights—eternally speaking and prophesying and lamenting. Viola thought that if only she could reach the sea she would not be lonely any more. She would throw herself down beside it, and it would know everything: all the fear and the longing, the love and pity that was in her; and then the pain would go, and the waters would creep up to her softly and tell her not to grieve, and she would fling herself into the beautiful waves, and then—— Suddenly the child stretched out her arms and sank against the window passionately sobbing.

Very white and very still was the mist to-night. Even in high midsummer it might often be seen hanging about that damp old park, and this was early in the spring, before the bursting of the leaf.

One might fancy that the mist lay as a curse upon the place, shrouding all things, chilling all things, bringing to all things rottenness and decay.

Was there some influence in the atmosphere of that old house that was like the still, penetrating mist without?—something that worked its stealthy way into the heart, shrouding all things, chilling all things, bringing to all things rottenness and decay?

CHAPTER II.

A YOUNG MAN CALLED MOMUS.

VIOLA SEDLEY, the youngest and the only girl among a family of boys, was a pale, dark-haired little creature, with large grey eyes and delicately cut features. People said that she exactly resembled her mother, but the resemblance was only superficial. Mrs. Sedley's hair was smooth and shining, while Viola's fell about her massively, for it was heavy and thick. Mrs. Sedley's eyes were brown and quiet; Viola's had the grey, shifting tint that marks the nervous temperament, and the yearning look of a sensitive, bewildered soul. Her father saw only the likeness between mother and daughter, and he called the child, in impatient displeasure, "a little Puritan." He would have preferred to see her a robust, coarse-fibred creature of his own kind; a girl who would have no reserve or sensitiveness or subtleties of feeling. Mrs. Sedley, with her still, dutiful ways and religious principles, had irritated him from the first day of her meek reign at the Manor-House, and he was highly displeased to find that Viola promised to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Mr. Sedley, by nature, was blustering and self-indulgent, but on the whole well-meaning, with the fatal habit of so

many people who mean well, of getting into debt. His wife's tendencies, on the other hand, were ascetic. Her conscience never let her rest until she had made things as unpleasant for herself as circumstances would permit, and by long practice in these arts she had now achieved a ghastly power of self-suppression. Her reward had been the approval of her own conscience and the half-contemptuous approbation of her lord. He regarded her, in the most literal and simple-minded manner, as his possession, and Mrs. Sedley piously encouraged him in an idea which she thought was amply confirmed by the Scriptures.

Happy the religion and happy the society that can secure beings of Marian Sedley's type for its worshippers, for the faith of such people remains as steady under "conspiracies of tempest from without, and tempest from within," as it stands beaming with uplifted eyes on days of halcyon calm. Rooted beyond the farthest wanderings of the Reason, it lies securely out of reach of any attack that may be directed against it through that ungracious faculty.

Mrs. Sedley, following the dictates of her creed, had spent her life in the performance of what she called her wifely duty, and this unfailing submissiveness, this meek and saint-like endurance, had now succeeded in turning a man originally good-hearted into a creature so selfish, so thick-headed, and often so brutal, that even his all-enduring wife used to wonder, at times, if Heaven would give her grace to bear her heavy cross patiently to the end!

Nature, regardless, as usual, of motives, was taking her stern revenge upon the woman who had spent her whole virtuous life in drawing out her husband's evil nature, and in stunting what little good there was in him by her perpetual encouragement of his caprices and her perpetual self-effacement. Morbidly apt at self-reproach on all other points, she never even suspected that the wreck of this man's life was partly her own doing. She accepted the consequences of her acts not as their natural punishment, but as another Heaven-sent trial to be borne without murmuring.

Among her numerous "Heaven-sent trials" was the behaviour of her three eldest sons, the first of whom had been obliged to leave the country after a detected attempt to cheat at cards. The other two were in the army, living royally beyond their means, and appearing to derive no benefit whatever from the heartrending prayers offered up daily, almost hourly, by their anxious mother for their welfare, temporal and spiritual. There had been many painful scenes at the Manor-House of late between Mr. Sedley and his sons; the father refusing to pay their ever-recurring debts, while the mother prayerfully interceded on their behalf. The times were very bad just now; rents were falling, farms being given up; if things went on like this much longer, Mr. Sedley declared, they would all be in the workhouse! His own debts

were steadily accumulating, but of this he said nothing to his wife. Viola was not of marriageable age, and therefore unable as yet to retrieve the family fortunes. Retrenchments became necessary, but the burden of these Mrs. Sedley took first upon her own shoulders, and then laid small hardships on her daughter, Mr. Sedley being shielded till he could be shielded no longer.

Miss Gripper, a severe maiden, who lived and did needlework in the village, used to remark upon the shabbiness of Mrs. Sedley's garments when she appeared, with Viola and her youngest son Geoffrey, in church every Sunday morning. Miss Gripper added that when Providence placed people in a certain position, it expected certain things of them; and, in *her* humble opinion, it showed a thankless, not to say an irreverent spirit to appear in the Lord's house Sunday after Sunday in a turned black silk,—and not such very good quality, to begin with!

Miss Gripper's feelings were threatened, as time went on, with greater and greater outrage, for the young men were going from bad to worse; yet Mrs. Sedley loved and hoped on. It was still her sons who made the most irresistible appeal to her motherly affections: the girl, beloved as she was, must always be prepared to make sacrifices for her brothers. In order that they should have a college education and every social advantage, Viola had to go almost without education at all; to afford them means to amuse themselves stylishly, their sister must be stinted of every opportunity and every pleasure. The child of course accepted this without question: her whole training dictated subordination of self to the welfare of her fellow-creatures, above all to that of her father and her brothers. She had absorbed this congenial doctrine readily, for she was her mother's ardent worshipper, and promised to be a credit to that exemplary lady. She seemed indeed less bright and happy than a child ought to be, but then Mrs. Sedley laid more stress on religious and moral qualities than on mere happiness. Possibly Viola's sex made happiness seem unessential; for the mother would certainly have been much concerned had she seen one of her boys wandering about with that wistful look in his eyes, that strange accustomed sadness which she scarcely noticed in her little girl. Yet Mrs. Sedley anticipated the troubles of her daughter's future with unspeakable dread. What had a woman to look for—a dutiful woman such as Viola must be—but sorrow and pain, increasing as her life's shadow lengthened on the dial? If not quite so heart-breaking as her mother's life had been, Viola's could not escape the doom that lurks in the air of this world for all women of her type. Indeed, for all kinds and conditions what sorrow and lamentation! For each type its peculiar miseries, but the cup for all!

There were times when Mrs. Sedley, forgetting for a

moment the steadiness of her faith, felt that it might be better if the child were to pass away to another world before she had tasted the sorrows of this one. But already the childish heart had swelled with sorrowful emotion; already a dim threatening consciousness of the awful solitude of a human soul drowned in the deeps of life and eternity had raised a panic within her. She was cursed with that melancholy metaphysical consciousness of the Infinite and the Unknown with which the British mind is usually so entirely untroubled. Viola, however, was not a persistently gloomy child. When her brother Geoffrey (a boy a couple of years her senior) came home for the holidays, she plunged heart and soul into his occupations, and was as happy as only children (and possibly angels) know how to be. Geoffrey was a long-legged, good-hearted schoolboy, with rosy cheeks, brown eyes, and a mop-like head of fair hair. He was at Eton, acquiring a mystic thing called "tone," which evinced itself when he came home in lively practical jokes of a most harassing character, played upon everybody within reach, without respect for age, sex, or dignity; chiefly, however, upon the maids and gardeners, who might at such times have answered Mr. Mallock's question, whether life is worth living, with a unanimous and gloomy negative.

The head-gardener, Thomas, whose mowing-machine had been put out of order, whose tools had been lost beyond recall, whose watering-pots leaked consistently, was heard to threaten to speak to Mr. Sedley if this sort of thing went on much longer. The second gardener, "Old Willum," as his chief called him, was made of softer stuff, showing lenience towards the little escapades of youth, even when Geoffrey took occasion to substitute charlock for cabbage-seed as soon as the old man's back was turned, causing the long-suffering one to sow a fine crop of that pestiferous weed in the kitchen-garden. "Old Willum," with his rheumatism, his patient industry, his tender old heart, was incapable of resentment.

Viola had a passionate love and pity for this old man; her eyes used to soften at the sound of his voice, at the sight of his bent figure trundling a wheelbarrow, or digging up the everlasting weeds in the gravel terrace before the house. "Old Willum," her mother, and Geoffrey were the beings on whom she expended the treasures of her affection; on these, and on Bill Dawkins, a handsome unclipped poodle named in affectionate memory of a departed under-gardener, who had been a great favourite with the children. Bill Dawkins was indeed an enchanting animal, ridiculously intelligent for such a world as this; a creature full of life and enterprise, true to the core, and devotedly attached to his little mistress.

He and Geoffrey used to treat her with a certain chivalrous condescension as "a weaker vessel." Bill Dawkins, in his moments of wildest excitement, would turn and run back encouragingly to see that Viola was following.

What adventures those three used to have together in the woods and fields, in the beautiful rambling old gardens of the Manor House! And what intoxication there was in this new-found liberty for the closely-watched, closely-guarded child!

The mere sight of the sunshine pouring down upon the open midsummer fields, the mere thrill of a bird's note, as the three companions set off together upon some wild ramble, would stir the little heart almost to bursting.

Only now and then in poetry would she find relief for this pent-up painful rapture, but books of poetry were not very plentiful at the Manor-House; besides, Mrs. Sedley did not think any poet, except Cowper, safe reading for her daughter.

So there was nothing for it as regards expression but to run riot with Bill Dawkins over the fields, and to join in his wild, consciously fruitless chases after starlings, skylarks, or some old rook, who flapped his glossy wings in dignified retreat from the presumptuous assailant.

The child's whole heart went out in love towards the living creatures around her; and the sight of suffering among the least of these would bring hot tears of anguish to her eyes. Things that she saw in the fields—the preying of creature upon creature, the torture suffered and inflicted in the every-day game of life—caused her many a bitter pang, and induced her to ask questions when she went home which Mrs. Sedley found very difficult to answer. She generally told Viola that all things were wisely ordered, and that we must not permit a questioning spirit to grow up in us, as that would lead to doubt and sin.

So Viola was silent; but when next she saw the piteous terror of a mouse, as it awaits, horror-stricken, the spring of its captor; when next she heard the almost human scream of the hare when its doom overtakes it, she wondered as painfully as ever at the strange conflict and struggle of Nature, though she closed her lips and let the problem eat deeper and deeper into her bewildered soul.

A lake on the park boundary was the favourite haunt of this happy trio. Here in spring they would watch the frog-spawn developing into masses of wriggling tadpoles, finding never-ending interest in watching these Protean reptiles, who shed their frivolous tails and appeared suddenly as sedate and decorous young reptiles, wanting only size to give them that expression of unfathomable profundity which in the full-grown frog seems to hint at wisdom greater than all the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Viola used to keep some tadpoles in a water-butt behind one of the sheds in the garden, giving them romantic names, and secretly hoping that in course of time they would come to answer to them. She consulted Thomas on the subject, but he shook his head with a knowing wink, and said he didn't think

tadpoles took, as one might say, much notice,—not tadpoles in a ordinary way, he didn't think.

Viola urged that Marmion, the biggest of the tadpoles, used to swim to meet her when she appeared, but she observed that he did the same at the approach of Thomas, who had absolutely no sympathy with tadpole nature. To "Willum," who showed fondness for the creatures (as was only natural), they paid no special regard: they wagged their tails at everybody, and showed a great lack of discriminating power in their ceaseless exultation.

On the whole, one could enter into closer and more personal relations with their elder brothers down at the lake, only that here their vast numbers made strictly selective friendship a matter of difficulty. On one occasion, when the children were deeply engrossed in trying to persuade a green and juicy young frog to eat Albert biscuits, they looked up and beheld a young man standing beside them laughing, and a little behind him a tall lady, also laughing.

The children started up in shy alarm.

"So this is the way you two wild young people amuse yourself," said the lady, who was no stranger, but the children's aunt Augusta, one of Mr. Sedley's sisters, who had married and settled at Upton, a village about twelve miles from the Manor-House.

She was an important, self possessed-looking woman, tall and thin, with dark eyes, hair, and complexion, a long face, rather thin lips, and a neat compact brow.

Her face expressed her character pretty accurately.

Harry Lancaster, her present companion, used to say of her, that she had enough will-power to drive a steam-engine, an unassailable self-confidence, and opinions of cast-iron.

She was an ambitious woman, whose ambitions had been gratified by her marriage with Lord Clevedon, a courtly person of the old school, with whom she had really fallen in love after a fashion, perhaps because he satisfied her innate desire for all that is dignified and grandiose.

Harry Lancaster was a slim, boyish-looking, brown-haired fellow, with a frank, humorous face, whose charm lay chiefly in its expression. His dark, bluish-grey eyes were brimming over with amusement and sympathy, as he stood with folded arms looking down upon the two shame-faced children.

"It seems ages since I saw you, my dears," said Aunt Augusta, in her clear, self-confident accents. "Are you never coming to see me and your cousins again? Percy was asking after you only this morning, and little Augusta too. I think I must carry you off with me to-day after lunch, no matter what your mother says. My good sister-in-law thinks me too frivolous a person to trust her chicks to," she added to Harry, with a laugh.

"And so you are," said Harry. "I have had serious

thoughts of leaving your hospitable roof because I find your influence morally deleterious."

"Impertinent boy! And before these children too! My dears, you must always put cotton-wool in your ears when this wicked cousin of mine speaks. He is a very dreadful young man, I must tell you—the most dreadful thing under the sun: a Radical!"

"What is a Radical?" asked Geoffrey, looking up into the face of the "dreadful thing," which smiled amiably.

"A creature in the form of a human being, but with the soul of a demon," answered Lady Clevedon. "I don't know if he feeds upon little children, but he certainly devours widows' houses."

The children stared.

"After dark," pursued her Ladyship, "he becomes phosphorescent, and emits from his mouth and nostrils green fire."

Geoffrey laughed at this in a sceptical manner.

"It's all very well to laugh," said his aunt, "but you don't know what a dangerous young man it is! Let us stroll back together to the house, and I will try to get your mother's permission to take you home with me."

A visit to Clevedon was like a visit to a fairy palace, and the children followed their aunt and her talkative companion across the park, with hearts beating high for pleasure.

Mrs. Sedley was inclined, as usual, to find some reason against their going, but her husband interposed. Through his sister he hoped some day to find a wealthy husband for his daughter.

"Take them, my dear, take them," he said graciously.

The neighbouring estate to that of Lord Clevedon had just been inherited by a distant relation of the late owner, who was without sons or nephews, and this new Sir Philip Dendraith had a young son who would be just the right age for Viola when they both grew up, and who would also be one of the most eligible young men in the county.

"It will do the children a world of good to have a little outing," said Mr. Sedley cheerfully.

He was a big thick-set man, with a ruddy face, reddish hair, and rather bleared light blue eyes. There was a certain jauntiness about his manner, and he was a notorious flirt; though, as his sister very frankly remarked, "no clever woman could ever be got to flirt with him; he was not amusing enough." In point of fact, to a woman of sensitive type his gallantry seemed little short of insulting.

"Have you seen anything of your new neighbours?" Mr. Sedley inquired, as the little party sat down to lunch in the big, dull, old fashioned dining-room of the Manor-House.

"Sir Philip Dendraith and his family? No; at least I have seen Sir Philip and his son at a meet of the Upton hounds, but I have not yet called on his wife. He is an appalling

creature; loud, pushing, altogether obnoxious. It is a sad pity that the main branch of the family died out; this man is not fit for the position."

"And the son?" inquired Mr. Sedley.

"Ah! he is of quite a different stamp; a true Dendraith; handsome, polished, keen-witted. He reminds me of that portrait of Andrew Dendraith at the old castle on the cliff, the man in the last century who was said to have killed his wife because he discovered she was in love with another man."

"Handsome, then?" said Mr. Sedley.

"Wonderfully handsome," Lady Clevedon answered. "Of course his parents are crazily fond of him."

"Ah! I suppose you will call at once at Upton Court."

Lady Clevedon shrugged her shoulders.

"My instinct is to put off the evil day."

"Bad habit, putting off!" said Mr. Sedley, sagely, at which his sister gave a sardonic chuckle. Perhaps she was thinking of Mr. Sedley's debts!

After luncheon the two children were taken off to the "Palace of Delight." Harry Lancaster entertained them during the twelve miles' drive with a running stream of fantastic talk. Lady Clevedon sat back in the carriage and quietly laughed at him, while Harry, on his side, seemed to be amusing himself in a sort of secret sub-fashion with the rest of the company, and with the entire situation.

He was one of those happy people to whom life is always more or less amusing, and this pleasant sensation became particularly keen when he was visiting his "baronial cousin," as he called her.

Most people were frightened of Lady Clevedon, who was noted for her powers of satire, but Harry bared his head to the storm, and its lightnings played about him harmlessly. She liked his audacity, even when he attacked her most cherished convictions.

With all his boldness and freedom, he was what she was pleased to call a "gentleman," a title which she bestowed or withheld with a discrimination sometimes a little arbitrary.

"I wish I knew what you mean by 'gentleman,'" Harry said, after some unoffending person had been consigned to the region of outer darkness, where there are no gentlemen, but only weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. "I think you are inclined (perhaps we all are) to make the word stand for a certain sublime something which we mix up in a glow of excitement with qualities purely social."

"My dear boy, we are not all etymological dictionaries; we use words in their ordinary accepted sense, and leave definitions to—'the Unemployed.'"

"But," persisted Harry, "I want to know what *is* meant in common parlance by a 'gentleman.'"

"Ask me to express one of the 'ultimate elements' (which

you are always prosily talking about) in terms of something else," returned her Ladyship.

"Ah! that's an idea!" Harry exclaimed joyously. "A gentleman is a social *element;* he can't be reduced to any lower terms; he is among the original bricks of which the universe is built; he is fundamental, indestructible, inconceivable, and——"

"Harry, is *nothing* sacred to you? Does this horrible Radicalism sweep away all the traditions that you learnt at your mother's knee?"

"Far from it," said Harry. "Although I have no respect for class, and no reverence for rank, I still realise that the house of Lancaster stands apart from and above all principalities and powers, and that it is more glorious in its fall than ever it was in the palmiest days of its prosperity."

"You don't deserve to belong to it!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon. "This virus of democracy has poisoned your whole system."

"Democracy--what is democracy?" questioned Harry, pensively.

"The misgovernment of fools by madmen!" she returned.

He smiled. "You murder with a definition!"

"I am sick of the nonsense that people talk now-a-days, calling themselves 'advanced,'" Lady Clevedon pursued;—"advanced in folly, let me tell them! Every shallow idiot with a clapper in his head thinks himself entitled to get up and make a jangle like any chapel-bell that whitens one's hair on Sunday mornings!"

"Use Mrs. Allen's hair-restorer," suggested Harry frivolously.

Lady Clevedon's face changed.

"Harry," she cried impressively, "there was a young man in ancient mythology of very good position, but he succeeded in rendering himself so obnoxious to the gods by his inveterate habit of making fun of them, that he at last got turned out of heaven. That young man's name was Momus."

"Unhappy Momus!" said Harry. "Do you chance to know any of the fatal jokes by which he lost his place among the Olympians?"

Lady Clevedon laughed.

"Much use it is to point a moral for *your* benefit, young man."

"Perhaps he chaffed Jupiter about his love-affairs, by Jove!"

"I dare say; he was a vulgar god. But be good enough to suit your conversation to these children."

"I am sure they are interested in Momus," said Harry. "The question you raise is one of extreme significance,—is it not so, Viola? I am sure you feel with me that the first instance of vulgarity on record is a subject of reflection for a philosopher."

"Harry, Harry!"

"One of the profoundest mysteries of the universe, my dear cousin; the bane of philosophy, the despair of religion, the insuperable obstacle to the doctrine of the soul's immortality, and the"——

"Harry, if you talk any more nonsense I shall stop the carriage and leave you ignominiously on the road."

"Well, well;—perhaps the day will yet come when I shall be taken at my true worth."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon as they drove through the gates of her domain; "that would be a punishment greater than you could bear!"

He made a grimace.

"To a woman I must not grudge the last word," he said.

His cousin laughed.

"When a man begins to give points to his adversary on account of her sex, the adversary may hoist the flag of victory."

"Take it," he said, "take it and be thankful!"

Clevedon was a large ugly block of building standing upon a raised plateau, whence the land sloped majestically towards the park.

The faces of the two children grew eager as the great white house appeared in sight.

The carriage having been dismissed, Aunt Augusta proposed a stroll till Percy and his sister should return from their ride. Meanwhile the children might gather some hothouse flowers to take back to their mother.

"What a fine old place this is, in its own way!" Harry observed, as they wended their steps to the garden; "it is so gentlemanly, so"——

"Harry! There was a young man in ancient mythology called"——

"Nay, so stately, so calm, so well-bred; so smooth and blandly expansive," pursued Harry, in language which would have pleased Quintilian, who always regarded as hopeful those pupils whose literary productions required pruning, rather than the young proficients whose style at the beginning showed the delicate reticence of maturity.

"I like the place; I am not going to have it scoffed at," said Aunt Augusta.

"Scoffed at! I am admiring it! Scoffed at! Why, I have a friendly feeling towards every nook and corner of it. I like it, I love it; but—it amuses me!"

"An incorrigible Momus!" cried Lady Clevedon.

"It is perfect," he broke out again. "I am sure Geoffrey and Viola agree with me that it is perfect."

"You bewilder these poor children, Harry."

"Just run your eye round the four quarters of the heavens. Could anything be more dignified? I repeat my question, Viola—could anything be more dignified?"

She shyly shook her head.

"No; nothing could be more dignified! Look how the land spreads out round the mansion, in a sort of liberal manner, as if it would say: I am at your entire disposal; pray take as much of me as you please, there is no stint; be expansive; the more so the better; you have only to mention the quantity and it is yours!

"Then observe what a benign and courteous sweep leads the eye from the terrace-level to the park. No abrupt lines there; your very curves are baronial! And your cattle! What an air of conscious worth! what splendour of outline and richness of colour! what harmony of action! what a Highland fling of movement! what"——

"If you make fun of my husband's Highland cattle, he'll never forgive you: better make fun of ME than that. Come, don't dawdle so; you are getting too garrulous."

But change of scene proved no check to his eloquence.

"There is nothing in the world to beat an old English garden," he exclaimed, rhetorically. "What sweet and lazy influences linger in the air by fern-fringed walls! what indolent joys exhale from flower-borders where violets and precocious primroses offer themselves to be cherished—it is as if one had found a new world!"

Viola looked up at him wonderingly, while Geoffrey, forgetting his shyness, suddenly began to talk—chiefly about rabbits and pistols and repeating-rifles. Then they all went into the hothouses, and came out laden with delicate sweetly-scented flowers, which Viola touched with ecstatic and reverent fingers.

The children were allowed to amuse themselves as they pleased, while Aunt Augusta and her talkative cousin strolled on together.

"Harry," she said, after a few minutes of desultory conversation, "have you given up that mad idea of yours yet?"

"About music?" His face changed and saddened.

"I cannot cure myself of the mad idea. Meanwhile, of course, I retain my commission," he added, rather bitterly.

"The sooner you cure yourself the better. As a musician you would starve. Besides, how do you know you have enough talent to"——

"I know nothing at all about my talents—(pardon me for interrupting); I only know that failure in that pursuit would be sweeter to me than success in any other."

"Foolish boy!"

"Now, Augusta, what do you mean? How often have you preached to me against doing things by halves; how often have you pierced with ridicule men who 'took up' a thing, and tinkled amiably upon some instrument, or made smudges on clean paper,—any one, in short, who tried to imitate the last stage of an art without laying the foundations. You said

it was like the attempt of a builder to roof a house that wasn't built."

"Well?"

"Well; why not build the house from the foundation?"

"Why not go and starve?" she inquired. "Go and starve to slow music?"

Harry paused for a moment, looking at her; and then, with one of his sudden inconsistent actions, he lifted his stick on to the tip of his first finger, balanced it there for a moment skilfully, and shot it up far and swift towards the sky. It rose, like a rocket, and came down again at a little distance into a gooseberry-bed.

"Take care that is not *your* fate," said Lady Clevedon.

"It must have been splendid going up," Harry returned; "and what a 'fine rapture' when it had risen to its utmost and felt the heavens above, and the earth widen beneath it"——

"And how exhilarating when it felt itself in the gooseberry-bed!"

"There are many sticks rotting in the gooseberry-bed that have never known the upper air at all," Harry observed; "they have secured themselves against all risk of downfall by prudently taking the lowest place."

"Like the Unjust Steward," suggested Lady Clevedon, whose Scripture was weak.

"Or the rebellious angels," added Harry, with a laugh.

He picked up a mouldering apple-twig and held it out to his cousin to consider.

"Observe, it is damp and brittle; I can snap it anywhere, for it has not the toughness of life in it. Lichen grows upon it, and unwholesome moss, and it is teeming with crawling and creeping things,—shall I show you?"

"Be good enough to keep away," cried the lady hastily.

"They are skurrying about in great agitation; they can't imagine what has happened. They are telling one another that they *knew* how it would be all along, and that if only *their* advice had been listened to"——

"D—a—m!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon, spelling the word (after her own fashion) as a concession to public sentiment, "here are Sir Philip Dendraith and his incomparable son! What effrontery to come here before we have called at Upton Court! I shall make him pay for this!"

Sir Philip Dendraith was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a hooked nose, high cheek-bones, sharp little blue eyes, and a grey beard, which retained signs of having once been reddish in tint. The younger 'Philip resembled his father scarcely at all; he was a slim, dark-haired youth, with face and figure almost faultless. Harry Lancaster, flinging away the decayed apple-twig, stood watching him with sudden intentness, while Lady Clevedon, donning her stiffest air, awaited the approach of the visitors. They raised their hats.

"Pardon our intrusion," Sir Philip called out in a loud voice; "we were taking a walk across country and lost our way" ——

"So I observe," said her Ladyship.

"Got into your park through the bit of woodland by the roadside down yonder, and found ourselves in the gardens before we knew where we were. Lady Clevedon, I presume?"

She bowed.

"Not——?" with an interrogative glance at Harry.

"Not," she repeated conclusively.

"Ah!" observed Sir Philip, throwing himself back and looking round, "charming garden you have here."

"I am glad it pleases you."

"Oh, vastly, vastly; fine old place altogether."

Lady Clevedon stood waiting.

"Ah!" cried Sir Philip, descrying Viola and Geoffrey in the distance, "your children no doubt?"

"No," she said, "not my children."

"Perhaps Lady Clevedon would be so kind as to mention which is the shortest way out of her domain," interposed Philip Dendraith the younger; "we have intruded long enough."

"Allow me to come with you; it is not easy to find the road unassisted," said Harry.

Sir Philip, apparently much against his will, was then hurried off by his son under Harry's escort.

"I trust we shall shortly renew our acquaintance," he said in parting; "near neighbours, like ourselves, should make a point of being friendly."

Again Lady Clevedon frigidly bowed.

As the three arrived at the end of the path they came upon Geoffrey and Viola peering curiously into some hot-beds.

"*Not* Lady Clevedon's children?" repeated Sir Philip.

"No; her nephew and niece," said Harry.

"Nice little girl!" observed Philip the younger. "Fine eyes."

She flushed up, and took a step backwards.

"Let me see what colour they are."

She shut the lids tightly and covered her face.

"Oh! unkind little girl! I shall tell your mamma," said Philip teasingly.

"Oh! no, no, *no!*" she cried, with unexpected terror; "*please* don't tell her."

"Is the mamma so formidable? Well, then, let me see your pretty eyes, and I promise not to tell how unkind you were."

But at this Viola again fell back, with a look of strange distress, whereupon Harry took her hand and said soothingly, "Never mind, Viola; this gentleman was only joking; he won't tell your mother, if you don't wish it."

He was holding open the garden-door as he spoke.

On the threshold Philip stopped, looked over his shoulder, and kissed the tips of his fingers gallantly.

"Nut-brown maid, farewell!" he said, and passed through with a laugh.

"Come on, Viola; let's go with them," cried Geoffrey, taking her hand; "he's rather a lark, that fellow."

But Viola passionately flung him off, and before he realised what had happened the child had run to the farther end of the garden.

"Rum things, girls!" was Geoffrey's comment as he pursued his new-found hero and philosophically left the eternal riddle to solve itself among the gooseberry-bushes,

When Harry returned after conducting the trespassers into the Upton Road, he found his cousin in a very bad temper.

"Intolerable creature!" she broke out. "Where can he have sprung from, with his voice and his manners? 'Fine place' indeed! Impertinent upstart! You were asking what a gentleman is, Harry; well, I can tell you what a gentleman is *not*:—Sir Philip Dendraith."

"Tactless person, certainly; and rather uncouth. The father and son are a curious contrast, are they not?"

"Most extraordinary! That boy is a Dendraith all over. Fine-looking lad."

"A gentleman, I suppose?" said Harry.

"Every inch!"

"I thought so. Well, as a mere *man*, give me that 'lumbering wain,' his father; more qualities to rely upon there; more humanity, in short. There is something polished and cold-blooded about that young Adonis, with his white teeth, that gives me a shiver all up my spine. It is astonishing how insolent polished people can be."

"The Dendraiths always were a little cold-blooded," said Lady Clevedon, "and a little over clever. It is *not* human to be very clever; one cannot disguise that fact."

CHAPTER III.

PHILIP DENDRAITH.

Sir Philip Dendraith, by a sudden turn of fortune's wheel, had been hoisted out of obscure and somewhat speculative spheres into the pure white light of what Harry Lancaster had called in his haste "landed propriety."

He was related to the last owner of the Dendraith estate through his mother's family, a fact which he had enjoyed and

made much use of his former existence, having a highly developed instinct of adoration for social pre-eminence, and a ferret's keenness in routing out unwilling relatives, lofty and far-removed, but profitable.

"My cousin, Sir John Dendraith," might have fallen from his dying lips in those prehistoric days when he owned to the solid and simple name of Thompson, and used to wander with his wife and son from small furnished house to smaller furnished house, where crochet antima-cassars and crystal lustres gave the keynote to existence. In those dark ages Mr. Thompson used to be always launching ideas which required capital and a company—brilliant ideas that only wanted carrying out, such as a method of blacking boots by machinery; patent umbrellas that opened automatically on being held upright, and folded up again when their position was reversed (facetious friends used to say that they even buttoned and unbuttoned themselves as occasion required). There were ingenious hooks and eyes that never came undone until their owner desired it, and then yielded without a struggle; coal-scuttles which made the putting on of coal a positive luxury to a sensitive invalid,—and other wonderful inventions, not to speak of the celebrated millennium double-action roller-blind, whose tassel could under no circumstances come off in the hand, and which never acquired the habit of rolling up askew and remaining blocked in a slanting and crazy position half-way up the window. As for his mowing-machine, and his instrument for putting out fires in their most advanced stages, a child might use them.

Philip Thompson was endeavouring to increase his small income by bringing some of these valuable ideas into notice, when one morning, to his infinite surprise, he awoke and found himself Sir Philip Dendraith; that is to say, he was informed that, by a most extraordinary series of events, he had become the next heir to the Dendraith estates, and it was hoped that he would assume the family name.

This he lost no time in doing, and with the name of Thompson he put away also things Thompsonian: his patent umbrellas and coal-scuttles; and now only his plump and simple-minded wife took any pride or interest in these once absorbing themes.

The social world was to this fortune-favoured man the only and the best of all possible worlds; to rise in it his sole ambition. With this object the family had always conscientiously kept *something* beyond their means, whether (said Lady Clevedon) it were a phæton or a footman, or merely a titled relative, stuffed and cured, to stand picturesquely in the middle distance and be alluded to. This, she added profanely, was of more value than many footmen.

Her inclination had been to remain unaware of the existence of the new baronet, but this idea was more easily conceived than carried out.

When a church-bell clangs loudly every Sunday morning close to your ears, philosophy counsels that you take no notice of the barbarism, but human frailty may nevertheless succumb.

Sir Philip had entered upon his new sphere in high good spirits, determined to enjoy all that it offered to the full, and to take his place among his peers with a dash and style that would make him known and respected throughout the country.

There was no escaping him. Like a teasing east wind that blows low, he met one round every corner, blustered against one at every turn, let one face north, south, east, or west in fruitless attempt at evasion. Perhaps Lady Clevedon, who could turn things social into ridicule cleverly enough, but to whom social laws were nevertheless indisputable, felt all along that there was no escaping the acquaintance of Philip Dendraith, be he mad, drunk, or a fiend in human shape; and she finally, in no very affable mood, drove over and called at Upton Court.

Lady Dendraith's plump good-nature much amused her visitor, and the latter came back disposed to be friendly towards the simple old person who was full of innocent pride in her husband and son, as well as brimming over with naïve astonishment at the sudden change in their fortunes.

"After lodgings and furnished houses, a place like this does seem wonderfully palatial; but my husband and son take to it as if they had been here all their lives, bless their hearts!"

"Bless *your* heart, old lady!" thought the visitor, who was forgiving to any one who amused her. "If ever there was a good old soul you are that person, my dear!"

As for Lord Clevedon, he regarded his new neighbours with the highest disfavour, though he too recognised the duty of knowing a Dendraith, in whatever stage of mental or moral decomposition he might chance to be.

"The fellow has none of the real Dendraith blood in him," he said; "it was a sad pity that the old stock died out."

"Have you seen the son?" asked Lady Clevedon.

Her husband straightened his thin figure, and drawing his head out of his necktie and collar, gave it a twist as if he had half a mind to unscrew the thing and take it down for closer examination—perhaps under the impression that the machinery wanted oiling.

"Yes, I have seen the son."

"Not like either of his parents, I think. Did he not strike you as being very like that portrait of Andrew Dendraith at the old house on the cliff?—the man who had such an extraordinary story, you know. I think he used to take opium among other things, and was suspected of having murdered his wife—though nobody could ever prove it. He was a man of considerable power, but I don't fancy he minded the pre-

cepts he used to write in his copy-books as he might have done."

"The fellow was no credit to his relatives," said Lord Clevedon, screwing his head on again as a hopeless case (the works required a thorough cleaning, and he didn't see his way to getting it done).

"Andrew Dendraith," he continued, "was one of the bad characters that seem to crop up in the family now and again, as if there were some evil strain in it not to be overcome."

"It is curious that this young Philip should be so like Andrew," said Lady Clevedon; "the relationship is not very close, but the resemblance, to my mind, is striking. In figure they are alike; this boy is tall and slim and well put together, as Andrew was, and he has the same cold, keen, handsome face, with clean-cut features, and already there is plenty of control over the muscles. His manners are polished—too polished for his age, almost; though perhaps one fancies that, through seeing him beside his awful father, who really"——

"Who, upon my honour"—— assisted Lord Clevedon.

"Is likely to give the county a severe fit of social indigestion," concluded his wife.

However, the county gulped him down; and though it suffered from a pain in the chest, it did its duty to the new representative of the Dendraiths, calling upon his wife with exemplary punctuality.

Mrs. Sedley, among the rest, wearily set out to perform her task. She put on her best bonnet, provided herself with a card-case, and ordered the carriage.

No one ever quite knew if that old vehicle would hold together for another drive, but the family seemingly meant to go on paying its calls in it, till the faithful servant "died in harness," as Harry Lancaster used to say, with characteristic enjoyment of incongruous metaphors.

Geoffrey saw the old chariot at the door, and rushed in to ask if he and Viola might accompany their mother.

"And Bill Dawkins," added Viola.

"What larks if we break down on the road!" cried Geoffrey.

However, no such lively calamity occurred; they rumbled respectably along the high-road and through the little villages, Bill Dawkins behaving with the utmost decorum on the back-seat beside Geoffrey; so much so, in fact, that Viola was afraid he would get tired—whereat her brother jeered.

"Bill Dawkins isn't a *girl!*" he cried scornfully. "Are you, Bill?" at which compliment the poodle thumped his tail upon the carriage-cushion and cast down his eyes.

Sir Philip, coming down the avenue of Upton Court, met the carriage driving up. Viola and Geoffrey recognised him and looked at one another.

If Lady Clevedon or Harry Lancaster had been present,

they would have derived much gratification from the sight of the meeting between Mrs. Sedley and her new neighbour.

Sir Philip raised his hat gallantly and gave a loud shout of welcome.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sedley? Going to call on the old lady? That's right; she's just having a nap,—rather a weakness of Lady Dendraith's—afternoon naps."

"I fear we shall disturb her," said Mrs. Sedley in her steady, shy, withdrawn tones.

"Dear me, no, not at all; she will be delighted, I assure you. We were wondering we hadn't seen anything of you before. However, better late than never. Family cares, I daresay. These your chicks? Halloa! why, these are the two children I saw at Clevedon! Lady Clevedon's nephew and niece, of course. Well, my boy, can you conjugate your τυπτο, or do you spend all your time and brains on old Father Thames? You must make friends of *my* boy, though he is some years older than you; he can conjugate you anything you like, I can tell you. The young people are getting so clever nowadays, there's no holding them. I see the little girl has had the good taste to copy her mother," Sir Philip continued, chucking Viola under the chin. "Couldn't have had a better model, my dear. Will you give me a kiss?" he asked, bending down without waiting for permission.

"No, I won't," said the child, shrinking away from him and squeezing Bill Dawkins uncomfortably close to the farther side of the carriage.

Sir Philip laughed.

"Ah! you don't care to kiss an old man like me!"

"No, I *don't* want to kiss you!" said Viola irately. Bill Dawkins barked.

"Viola, dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Sedley, at which a look of intense trouble came into the child's face. If her mother's sacred wishes and her own feelings should come into open conflict, there would blaze up a small Hell in that childish breast; for, trivial as the occasion seemed to grown-up consciousness, the intensity of feeling that it called out is impossible to represent, much more to exaggerate.

"Come now, I *must* have a kiss," said Sir Philip in a playful manner, and going round to the other side of the carriage. "If you give me a kiss, I'll give you a sweetmeat when we get up to the house; there's a bargain now!"

"I don't want sweetmeats—I don't want sweetmeats," cried Viola, darting away again in increased dislike as Sir Philip's bearded face appeared beside her.

"She does not need any reward for behaving politely, I am sure," said Mrs. Sedley. "Viola, dearest, you will give this gentleman a kiss when he asks you to do so."

The child's eyes fixed themselves in silent desperation on the ground. Her face became white and set.

"That's a good little girl," said Sir Philip. "I am sure we

shall soon be excellent friends, for I am very fond of children. Now for my kiss."

He bent forward to take it, when Viola, with a suppressed cry, wildly plunged off the seat to the bottom of the carriage and hid her face in the rug. Upon this Bill Dawkins became violently excited, alternately jumping down to thrust his nose against Viola's hair, and springing on to the seat to bark persistently in Sir Philip's face, getting more and more enraged as that gentleman threw back his head and laughed heartily, with the remark that he had never been treated so unkindly by a lady before.

"Well, I suppose I must give it up for the present," he said. "If you will drive on to the house, Mrs. Sedley, I will return with you."

"Oh! please don't let us bring you in," began the visitor, but Sir Philip drowned her remonstrance, and directed the coachman to drive on.

He met the carriage at the door, and helped Mrs. Sedley to alight.

Bill Dawkins sprang out with a yelp of joy, followed by Geoffrey. On the steps stood Philip Dendraith the younger.

"Now then, little woman," said Sir Philip kindly enough, as Viola held back, with defiant eyes. "Come along."

"Come on, you young silly!" urged her brother. "He doesn't want to kiss you now."

Sir Philip leant across the carriage with a laugh, upon which the child, making a violent effort to escape, flung herself against the door at the farther side, and fell, hurting her head and arm. In falling she had moved the handle of the door, which suddenly burst open.

"Good heavens! save her!" cried Sir Philip.

Before the words were out of his mouth, his son, with marvellous rapidity, had darted round just in time to rescue the child from a dangerous fall. Her body was half out of the carriage when he caught her in his arms and carried her quickly into the house, where he laid her on a sofa and summoned his mother to the rescue. Mrs. Sedley had, fortunately, not seen the accident.

"Poor dear little creature!" cried the good Lady Dendraith, who had just been roused from her "nap," "are you much hurt, my dear? I think not, for she doesn't cry at all."

"She never cries," said her mother, shaking her head; "she is like a little woman when she hurts herself."

"Dear, dear!—what would she like, I wonder?—some brandy and water to revive her, and perhaps she ought to see the doctor."

But Mrs. Sedley thought that she could easily manage with the help of a few simple remedies. Viola appeared to have been rather startled than really hurt.

She lay quite quiet, but with an anxious, watchful look in

her eyes, which changed to something approaching terror when Sir Philip's loud voice was heard in the hall.

She started up.

"Don't let that man come in; don't let him come in!" she cried wildly.

Lady Dendraith looked surprised, and Mrs. Sedley naturally felt uncomfortable.

"Hush, Viola dear, nobody will disturb you; you should not speak so, you know; it is not like a little lady."

"I don't want to be like a little lady!" cried Viola, who seemed to be in a strange state of excitement.

"I think," said Mrs. Sedley, "that I ought to take her home at once, though I am sorry to cut short my visit to you, Lady Dendraith; and I am most grateful for your kindness to my little girl."

When Mrs. Sedley said she would go she always went without delay, and Viola having shaken hands with her hostess (she refused to kiss her, though without impolite remarks), returned to the carriage on foot, looking behind her in a frightened manner lest her *bête noire* should be present.

He was standing in the entrance when they went out, and expressed much concern at the shortness of the visit. Viola shrank away to the other side of her mother.

"Well, young lady, I am glad to see you are all right again. Upon my honour, you sent my heart into my mouth when you burst that door open! What a fierce little maiden it is! I hope you won't treat your lovers in this fashion in the time to come, or you will have much to answer for."

Mrs. Sedley, objecting to have Viola spoken to about lovers, cut the conversation short by shaking hands with her host once more and entering the carriage.

"No, I am not going to ask for a kiss now," said Sir Philip, as Viola shrank away hastily, "but I think my son, who saved you from a severe accident, deserves one; and you won't mind kissing *him*, though you are so unkind to his poor old father."

"I don't want to kiss anybody as long as I live!" cried Viola. "I hate everybody; I"——she broke down with sheer passion.

Father and son burst out laughing, and Philip, bending down, lifted her swiftly in his arms, quietly kissed her in spite of her violent resistance, and placed her in the carriage beside the poodle who received her with acclamation. She struck her laughing enemy with her clenched fist, and then flinging herself against the cushions, she hid her face, drawing up the rug over her head, and burst into low heart-broken sobs.

"Viola, Viola!" in tones of surprised remonstrance from Mrs. Sedley.

The carriage rolled away down the avenue and emerged into the bare down country, but the child did not stir. Mrs.

Sedley was afraid that this unwonted excitement might be the precursor of some illness, and thought it wiser not to interfere except by a few soothing words.

Geoffrey showed a boyish inclination to laugh at his sister for making such a fuss about nothing, but his mother reproved him, as it seemed to make her more excited.

Bill Dawkins was greatly concerned about her. He searched her out among the rugs, as if he were hunting for rats, and expressed his sympathy with wistful eloquence. Once she put her arm round his neck and drew him to her passionately, and if it had not been for his thick coat, the good poodle might have felt some hot tears falling on his shaggy head.

Viola did not recover her spirits all that day. Mrs. Sedley watched her anxiously, and sent her to bed early, with compresses on her arm and a bandage on her head.

When all was quiet, and Viola found herself alone, she crept out of bed, went to the window and drew up the blind. There stood the avenue, stately and beautiful in the moonlight, wreathed with mists.

The vision brought the tears welling up again from the depths of the child's wounded soul. Her grief was all the bitterer because she could not express it in words even to herself; she could only feel over and over again, with all a child's intensity, that she had been treated with insolence, as a being whose will was of no moment, whose very person was not her own; who might be kissed or struck or played with exactly as people pleased, as if she were a thing without life or personality. Her sense of individual dignity—singularly strong in this child—was outraged, and she felt as if she could never forgive or forget the insult as long as she lived. The jocular good-natured way in which it had been offered made it only the more unbearable.

"I hate you; I *hate*," cried Viola, mentally apostrophising her enemies, "I hate everybody in the world—except mother and Bill Dawkins."

CHAPTER IV.

RELIGIOUS DIFFICULTIES.

As soon as her children had acquired enough cohesion to sit upon a pew-seat, Mrs. Sedley had taken them to church. Sometimes, indeed, she had been too hasty and taken them almost before that epoch, so that the hapless little beings used to crumple up and slip to the ground, keeping their mother occupied in gathering and replacing them during the service.

Among Viola's earliest remembrances were these miniature

declines and falls, which had generally been occasioned by her being painfully tired during the early part of the service through the dire necessity of sitting still, and by the sleepy exhaustion produced at last by an infinite number of suppressed desires; among them a very vivid longing to stroke the sealskin jacket of the former Lady Dendraith, who used to sit in the pew just in front of her. Once, in fact, watching her opportunity with beating heart, she had actually realized her soul's ambition by drawing her little hand timidly down from Lady Dendraith's shoulders to her waist, and then leaving off in a panic on hearing a smothered chuckle from one of her too wide-awake brothers.

These delinquents took a special delight in leading her into mischief during service. The pew was large, and ran in two directions at right angles to one another, so that there was one part of it quite out of Mrs. Sedley's range of vision, where unholy deeds might be wrought. Here they would pelt one another with dried peas and paper pellets, or build a Tower of Babel out of prayer-books; the stately edifice almost reaching to the top of the pew. (It was one of Harry Lancaster's wicked sayings, that Mrs. Sedley was going to mount into heaven upon a staircase of these volumes, and it must be admitted that the number of her books of devotion was exciting to the profane imagination.)

Viola characteristically took all matters connected with religion in grim earnest. Her after-pangs of remorse if she had taken too much interest in the Tower of Babel were very keen, and she often suffered indescribable terrors from the conviction that her sins would be punished in the fires of hell. Sometimes she experienced strange emotional upliftings when she believed that she felt the very presence of Christ, and a passionate inspiration for a life devoted only to his service. And then would follow days of fruitless effort to keep up to the level of these ecstatic moments.

On Sunday afternoons it was Mrs. Sedley's custom to read the Bible with the two children, taking them into her own special sitting-room (*boudoir* is a term inconsistent with this lady), and closing the door after her with a quiet solemnity which to Viola had something of awful sacredness.

Geoffrey, alas! had been known to whistle a secular melody after that ceremony of initiation, and it was a common amusement with him to secretly alter all the markers in his mother's Bible and "Daily Meditations;" or to place them against chapters in the Old Testament that consisted chiefly of proper names, because his mother found some difficulty in pronouncing them.

After the reading, the children were allowed to express their ideas upon what they had heard, and to ask a few questions. Geoffrey always took a morbid interest in Satan, and (Satan being a biblical character) Mrs. Sedley could not con-

sistently refuse to gratify it. His questions were of a nature to whiten the hair of an orthodox mother.

Viola's difficulties were of another kind. She could not understand the stories of holy treachery and slaughter related of the children of Israel, in whose wanderings she and her brother always took the keenest interest. It was an actual grief to her when her heroes suddenly broke away from a most well-ordered and respectable career to go forth, like a swarm of hornets, to injure and destroy. That "the Lord commanded them" only made the matter darker. Mrs. Sedley could not enter into these difficulties. She herself would not have hurt the poor fly, which appears to be regarded as the last creature entitled to human mercy (unless, perhaps, it interrupted her prayers or distracted her attention from holy things); but she entirely approved of the wholesale massacres perpetrated by the chosen people in the name of the Lord, and considered that His name was greatly glorified thereby.

Viola was also disturbed by the strange story about Balaam when he was sent for by Balak to come and "curse him" the Israelites. "God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him: If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them: but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do."

So Balaam naturally goes.

Then, to Viola's infinite bewilderment, "God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him."

The child's face of dismay at this apparent instance of Divine inconsistency would have been comic had it not been piteous.

"But why was God angry when He had told Balaam the night before to go with the men if they came to call him?"

Mrs. Sedley first said that "the ways of Providence were past finding out," but remembering that her sister-in-law had once burst into a fit of immoderate laughter at this reply, she suggested that the Lord had possibly meant to try Balaam's faithfulness.

She never noticed in her younger pupil the hungry desire to find some real loveliness that she could worship; she never saw the piteous efforts of the tender-hearted child to adore the God who sent forth the Israelites to smite whole races with the edge of the sword, and to leave not one remaining of the people.

Fortunately the New Testament was read on alternate Sundays, and if to love Christ be the one thing needful for salvation, Viola certainly fulfilled the condition. She was an enthusiastic little Christian, though there were yet many flaws in her orthodoxy which her mother had to patch up as best she might.

Being made sound on one side, she was apt to give way on

the other, causing poor Mrs. Sedley much trouble, and demanding more mental agility than she possessed. How God could be willing to accept the pain and grief of one divine being as a substitute for the pain and grief of other guilty beings was what Viola could not understand. If the guilt could pass away from the guilty at all, how should God let the burden of it rest on some one else, as if God were greedy of pain for His creatures and could not forgive generously and entirely? It was like the story of the young prince who, when he was naughty, had a little slave beaten in his stead, quite to the satisfaction of the royal father. Religious difficulties began early in Viola's experience, as probably they do in most essentially religious natures. Doctrine and dogma and commentary were provided for her so liberally, that, as Wilkins, the coachman, technically remarked, "it was enough to give the poor child a surfeit." Thomas, with his practical instincts, "didn't see no sense in cramming a lot o' religion into a young lady with Miss Viola's prospects, *he* didn't—not a lot o' fancy stuff of Mrs. Sedley's makin' up, as drawed down the face till it was as long as a 'olly'ock: and never a smile or a 'good day' to a soul about the place—he didn't see what good come of such religion, *he* didn't." And Thomas shoved his spade into the earth with a vigour corresponding to the vigour of his conviction that if *he* could see no use in a thing, use in it there could not possibly be.

When Geoffrey was away (and this, of course, was during the greater part of the year) Viola led a strange, lonely life. She had no companions, Mrs. Sedley being afraid to let her associate much with her cousins at Clevedon, because their training was, in her opinion, so godless.

Viola's education was of the simplest character. Her mother gave her lessons in history, geography, and arithmetic every morning after the usual Bible-reading and prayer, and as she grew older Viola had to practise her music for an hour every afternoon. Music being one of her passions, the hour, in spite of its drudgery, had its charms. The piano was in the drawing-room, a large dreary, dimly lighted dungeon, which chilled the very marrow of one's bones. The furniture was set stiffly against the colourless walls, while the dreary ornaments under their glass shades seemed—as Harry Lancaster fantastically remarked—like lost souls that had migrated into glass and china bodies, and there petrified, entranced, were forced to stand in the musty silence till the crack of Doom.

Just for one hour daily that musty silence was broken. It was an enchanted hour, especially in autumn and winter, when the fire-light made the shadows dance on the walls and ceiling, and threw a rosy glow over the whole colourless scene. And then the spirit of music arose and went forth, weaving spells, and calling from the shadows a thousand other spirits who seemed to fill the dull old room with tumultuous life and the air with strange sweet thrills and whispers from a world

unknown. Then the lost souls would cast off the curse that held them, and become half-human again, though they were very sad, indeed quite heart-broken, for they knew they were imprisoned in these ridiculous bodies till time should be no more, and then what awaited them but the torments of the damned? Viola would be seized sometimes with a panic as she thought of it.

There were two glass lustres on the marble mantelpiece, which caught the fire-light brilliantly, and in the centre an ormolu clock with a pale blue face of Sèvres china, a clock whose design must have been conceived during a vivid opium dream of its author, so wild and unexpected were its outlines, so distracted and fantastic its whole being.

"A drunken beast," Harry Lancaster had once called the thing after a state call at the Manor-House. As it had cost fifty pounds, Mrs. Sedley fondly hoped and concluded that it was exquisitely beautiful, and she would have been very much amazed, though but slightly offended, had any one presumed to doubt its loveliness.

If the imprisoned soul had a sensitive nature, how it must have suffered from the impertinent quirks and affected wrigglings of its domicile! how it must have hated being misrepresented to the world by so florid and undignified a body!

Perhaps Viola enjoyed her hour of practising so much partly because she was then certain to be alone. At no other time in the day could she count upon this. She would often remain in the drawing-room long after the practising was over, much to the astonishment of her mother.

There was something indescribably fascinating to the child in the silence that followed the music; it was quite unlike the silence that preceded it—unlike every other silence that one knew.

In autumn, when it grew dusk early in the afternoon, she could hear, between the pauses of the music, the sound of old "Willum's" broom sweeping the dead leaves from the path before the window. This too fascinated her. The notes would pour out at times as if they were inspired by the roar of the wind outside, which was stripping the great trees of their foliage,—and suddenly they would cease—a pause—then always again, through the wind's tumult, the steady swish-swish upon the gravel, and the old man's bent, patient form moving slowly forwards along his path of toil.

The wild freedom of the wind, the wild sweetness of the remembered music—the dim room, the lost souls—what was it in the scene that stirred the childish heart to its depths? Nature, human toil, human possibilities, joys unutterable, and unutterable dooms,—even here, in this sheltered, monotonous home, those spectres stood upon the threshold of a young life, to announce their presence to the soul.

CHAPTER V.

BREAKING BOUNDS.

If only she was left alone, Viola could make herself very happy in the gardens and quaint old surroundings of her home. She had the poetic faculty of drawing out the secrets of common things. The cucumber-frames, the old garden, the tumble-down red-roofed sheds where Thomas potted his geraniums, the apple-house smelling so deliciously, and the conservatory, with its warm sweet scents of earth and flowers; not one of these but gave her exquisite pleasure.

She had many favourite haunts and one secret retreat in the heart of a little wood whither she used to run at rare and ecstatic moments when she managed to elude the vigilance of her nurse.

Had it not been for Viola's loving reverence for her mother, she would have much oftener tasted the delights of liberty, for they were very sweet; poor little phantom of liberty as it was that she enjoyed, when for a brief half-hour she buried herself in her leafy hermitage and felt that no human being in all the world knew where she was or could interfere with her, mind or body.

Viola had all sorts of treasures here, gathered in the woods and fields: plants, snail-shells, oak-apples, and strange insects, which she kept in a large deal-box furnished forth with mould and greenery, much after the fashion of the poor tadpoles' home,—those tadpoles who, alas! had never thriven, and one morning, after a night of heavy rain, had been washed away, Heaven only knew whither. That had been a real tragedy to Viola, and now another was in store for her.

It was autumn; a mildly splendid day late in the season, but singularly warm for the time of year.

The nurse, happily, became languid with the heat, and sat down, while Viola was allowed to wander about by herself. She took the opportunity to visit her domain. The sunshine that filtered through the fretted beech-roof seemed different from any other sunshine that ever worked a forest-miracle; the wreaths of clematis and eglantine and the glossy-leaved briony flung themselves from branch to branch with wilder freedom than in any other spot in all the earth—so thought their little votary. The place corresponded to the vividly fresh and joyous side of the child's nature, as the chill drawing-room, with its lost and tortured souls, and its patient old patrol without sweeping dead leaves from others' pathways,

answered to the more thoughtful and melancholy side of her character.

The bower was sacred to Life and Liberty; the drawing-room to servitude and death, in all the forms in which they attack humanity.

Across the lawn, with Bill Dawkins at her heels, along a flower-broidered walk behind the garden-wall, Viola hastened; then out by a wicket-gate into the park, and across the open, in the face of staring cows, to a little copse, the sacred grove wherein the temple stood. She plunged in and pursued her way along the path which she had worn for herself in struggling through the underwood. She paused for a moment, thinking she caught an unusual sound in the solitude. There seemed to be a slight rustling and shaking among the leaves, as if the nerves of the little wood were thrilling. Viola's heart beat fast. What if her temple were discovered and desecrated? She hurried on breathlessly; the mysterious tremor continuing, or rather increasing, as she came near. Her forebodings were only too true!

There, in the holy of holies, stood Thomas, pruning-knife in hand (he had always been a maniacal pruner), tearing and cutting down the magnificent sheets of clematis,—just then in the height of its glory,—crushing the berries of the briony beneath his heavy boots, and running his ruthless knife round the trunks of the trees where the ivy climbed too high.

"O Thomas, Thomas, what *have* you done?" exclaimed Viola piteously. Bill Dawkins barked aggressively at the destroyer with his tail erect, exactly as if he were saying, "On behalf, sir, of this young lady, I demand an explanation."

The old iconoclast turned slowly round and looked at Viola and her poodle, not in the least understanding.

"I'm a takin' the ivy off some of these 'ere trees," he observed, dragging down a great network of greenery and flinging it on the ground.

"Why do you take down the pretty ivy?" asked the child tearfully.

"Explain yourself, sir," barked Bill Dawkins.

"Why, because it'll kill the trees if I leaves it grow," said Thomas.

"But why do you pull down the clematis and the briony? Oh, why do you, Thomas?"

"Why, Miss," said Thomas, puzzled, "I thought as it looked untidy sprawling all over the place; I didn't know as you liked to see it, or I wouldn't have touched it; not on no account."

Viola gave the old man a little sad forgiving smile and the hot tears fell as she moved desolately away, like some lost spirit driven from its home.

What maniac was it who said that sorrow is the nurse of virtue? Surely it is the inspirer of all rebellious sins. It is

like a storm, destroying old landmarks. How petty, how unnoticeable to the great tempest must seem the little walks and fences marking the "mine" and "thine" of men! And great sorrow, whatever its occasion, has in it all the blindness and the passion of a tempest.

It was not merely the defilement of the consecrated spot that filled the childish heart with grief. In its destruction Viola dimly saw a type of the degrading of all loveliness, the crushing of all exquisite and delicate things. A lonely life had fostered in her this poetic tendency to read figurative meanings into outward objects; and these types were to her not mere shadows, but solid links that bound together all the world, material and spiritual, in an intimately related whole.

It had always been one of Viola's dearest ambitions to reach the sea, the vision of whose sparkling immensity had strongly moved her when she and Geoffrey used to go up to the top of the great avenue and look down upon it.

But she was strictly forbidden to wander beyond the garden when her nurse was not with her, and the sea was not only beyond the garden, but beyond the park! Yet the sight of the avenue, with the long afternoon shadows lying across it, its tempting perspective leading the eye upwards towards the forbidden country, filled Viola with an overpowering desire to be on the verge of the great waters, to feel the sea-wind in her face and hear the boom of the waves upon the beach.

Her grief made ordinary rules seem petty, and she turned her steps towards the avenue, without pausing to consider consequences, causing Bill Dawkins to give a yelp of joy, and to run gaily after the cattle, who were staring with all their might at the intruders. And now the spirit of adventure began to stir in the child's breast, and she instinctively quickened her footsteps, thrilled with the sensation of her freedom and ready to buy it at almost any price.

Arrived at the top of the avenue, she stood breathless—Bill Dawkins by her side—and gazed at the brilliant scene before her. Wood and field and farmstead lay placidly dozing in the benedictory sunshine; these merging gradually into bare downs, and these again abruptly ending in the cliffs which reared their stately ramparts to the sea. The sea! Ah! there it lay stretched in a long gleaming line from farthest east to farthest west, hiding its mystery and its passion with a lovely smile.

Viola, climbing the locked park-gate, found herself upon the public road. She felt a faint thrill of awe as she saw it stretching before her, white and lonely between the clipped hedges.

It was poor upland country; quite different from the land about the Manor-house, which lay in the valley of a little stream. But so much the more wild and delightful!

How far away the sea might be, Viola did not know; she made straight for it, as if she had been a pilgrim bound for her shrine.

It was very lonely. For half an hour she had walked without meeting any one, and then the road ran through a little village where some children were playing and an old woman crept along with a bundle under her arm.

She stared at Viola, and the children stared. Bill Dawkins smelt at the bundle, and would have sniffed at the children, but they fled shrieking to their mothers. Viola quickened her pace, vaguely feeling that human beings were menacing to her liberty. A turn of the road took her again into solitude, and with it came a strange intoxication. How marvellous was this sunshine pouring down over the wide cornfields! It seemed to confuse all reflection and to wrap the mind in an ecstatic trance. How madly the larks were singing this afternoon! The fields were athrill with the flutter of wings and the air quivered with song. Once Viola was tempted to leave the road and take a short cut by the side of a little copse, where Bill Dawkins went wild after game, and caused his mistress some delay by his misdeeds. The shadows were perceptibly longer when she and the dishevelled poodle (now distinguished by a mud-covered nose) emerged again upon the high-road.

Here the sea came clearly into sight, acting upon the heart of the little pilgrim as a trumpet-call. The country became more and more bare and bleak as it rose towards the cliffs; the crops grew thinner, and gradually cultivation fell off into little patches here and there, till at last it ceased altogether, and there was nothing but the wild down grass shivering in the sea-wind.

If inland, the sunshine had seemed brilliant and all-pervading, here on the open downs, with the gleaming of the sea all round, its glory was almost blinding.

Would they never reach the cliff side?

Viola started into a run, and Bill Dawkins bounded madly in front of her, looking back now and then to make sure that she was following.

The saltness of the ocean was in the air; the fresh wind stung the child's cheeks to crimson. At last the end of the journey was reached; a little coastguard station marked the highest point, and then the land sloped with different degrees of abruptness towards the edge of the great cliff, which rose to a vast height above the sea, so that a boat rocking on the waves beneath had to be carefully sought for by the eye, and appeared as a tiny black speck upon the water.

There were a few streaks of smoke left far away on the horizon, in the wake of vanished steamers, and one or two fishing-boats lay becalmed; the sky line was lost in haze, a fine-weather haze, betokening heat. Viola sat down on the grass to rest, with her arm round Bill Dawkins. Oh the marvel of that sunshine! How the air thrilled and trembled with the splendour of it! The earth seemed as if it were swimming in a flood of light. Surely one could feel it reeling through

the regions of space, a joy-intoxicated creature! Viola looked round, half in fear, half in rapture, at the thought of the world's mad dance through endless solitudes, and she actually believed that she felt the whirl of its motion as the breeze went by, and the wide horizon seemed to swim round her dizzily.

The swerving sensation was perhaps increased by watching the sea-gulls poising and wheeling in the air along the giddy cliff-side, and the jackdaws swarming and chattering about its clefts and crevices.

Sometimes the gulls would rise above the summit of the headland and come so close to Viola that she could hear the strange creaking of their wings as they swooped and swung and swept in a thousand graceful caprices of movement, to finish dramatically with a sudden dive or turn in the air, uttering their melancholy cry. Viola felt herself thrill from head to foot. These birds fascinated her, but she did not like them. They seemed cold, able, finished creatures, but they had no feeling, they were utterly pitiless—like Philip Dendraith, she thought. The little jackdaws were not so graceful or so perfect, but they were pleasanter and more human. They were like his kind old mother.

Ah! how sweet was the scent of the earth! how sweet the breath of the sea! Viola envied the family of the coastguardsman who dwelt in the little whitewashed cottage, with its tar-blackened waterbutt outside the door, and the flag placidly curving over the roof in the faint sea-breeze. Two sea-gulls with flashing plumage were sweeping round it, grandly undulating, while on the bank outside the house lay a young child with round limbs bare to the sun and winds, a being almost as free as the wild sea-birds themselves.

Viola wished that she too had been a child of the coastguardsman, so that she might live always upon this cliff-side, in the fresh winds; always—sleeping and waking—have that sea-murmur in her ears, and the cry of the gulls thrilling her with sweet fancies. She was too excited to sit still. She rose presently and began to walk farther along the cliff, going near enough to the edge to see the scattered rocks at its foot, and to watch the gulls as they circled and swooped and settled in busy companies, intent upon their fishing.

At some distance farther along the coast another headland ran out into the sea, and upon it Viola could discern what looked like a ruined castle, standing desolate above the waves. Had she known the part which that castle was to play in her life she would have turned and fled back to her home instead of pursuing her adventure. She had heard her father speak of some old ruin on the coast: how once it stood far inland; but the hungry sea had gnawed at the cliffs till it crept up close to the castle, which now stood defiant to the last, refusing to yield to the besieger. As she drew near, Viola that there was a belt of wind-storm trees encircling

the ruin at some distance inland, and that in a hollow of the downs lay what seemed to be the gardens and surroundings of a human habitation. A gate led into a short avenue, at the end of which stood a large gloomy-looking house, built of grey stone.

The place appeared deserted and was falling into decay. On the steps moss was growing luxuriantly, the front door gave the impression that it was never opened, and the windows had evidently not been cleaned for years.

Viola's curiosity was aroused, but with it an undefined sense of fear; the place was so strangely lonely, and had such a deadly look of gloom. It recalled to the child her own lonely position, and suggested vague and awesome thoughts which had not assailed her out in the sunshine. But she could not leave the vault-like old house without further explorations. It had for her a mysterious fascination.

She found that it possessed great half-ruined stables and a large yard at the back,—the weeds growing apace between the paving-stones. She ventured to try if she could enter the house by the back-door, but it was locked; so was the door of the stable.

The gardens, which lay sheltered from the wind in the hollow, were beautiful in their neglected state. There was a terrace on the higher ground with a stately stone palisade, and at either end an urn, round which climbing plants were wreathed in the wildest abandonment. Below, among the little pillars of the parapet, a fiery growth of flowers rushed up, flame-like, amid grasses and self-sown vegetation of all kinds. The house was joined to the ruin, which ran out upon the headland, and appeared to be almost surrounded by the sea. Part of the castle had been repaired and converted into a dwelling, and this had then been added to till the habitable portion of the building attained its present gaunt appearance and great size.

Viola's next step was to explore the castle which stood perilously balancing itself on the extreme verge of the land, striking roots, as it seemed, into the rock, and clinging on to the narrow wave-fretted headland for dear life. The limestone cliff had been worn to a mere splinter, which ran out into the sea, the neighbouring land being reft into narrow gorges, into which the waves rushed searchingly with deep reverberations. The ruin was wonderfully preserved considering its exposed situation. The walls were of immense thickness, and it seemed as if the rock on which they stood must itself crumble before they yielded to the long-continued assault of time and weather. Apparently the castle had once been a Norman stronghold, though now only a very small portion of it remained to tell the tale.

By this time the brilliancy of the day had begun to decline; and with the afternoon had come that pensive look that settles upon a landscape when the light ceases to pour down upon

it directly from above. The voice of the wind, too, had grown melancholy as it wandered through the great ruined windows and stirred the sea-plants that had managed to establish themselves in the inhospitable soil.

Bill Dawkins of course had run wild, scampering hither and thither in breathless astonishment, poking his muddy nose into dark passages, scrambling helter-skelter to the top of a ruined staircase, where he would be seen standing with his comical alert-looking figure marked against the sky, tail high in the air, head well raised, and in his whole attitude an air of intelligent inquiry which would have convulsed with laughter anybody to whom animal life was a less serious affair than it was to Viola. The dog looked as if he ought to be scanning the horizon with a telescope to one eye.

Viola was just about to follow him up the steps, when she was startled, and for the moment terror-stricken, by a loud peal of laughter which rose above the ceaseless pulse-beat of the waves in the rock-chasms round about. She gave a low gasp and clutched a little tamarisk bush beside the staircase, for she had almost fallen. She listened breathlessly. The laughter was renewed, and Viola now heard several men's voices, apparently coming from the farthest part of the ruin. If she were discovered here, these men might be angry with her for trespassing. Her ideas were vague and full of fear; the romantic strangeness of the place, with its hollow subterranean sounds, excited her imagination. Though prepared for almost anything however, it did not occur to her that Bill Dawkins' scamper to the top of the ruined staircase, at that particular moment, was to determine the whole course of her future life; but so it proved.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CUSTODIAN OF THE CASTLE.

VIOLA crouched lower and lower in her hiding-place, for she fancied the voices were coming nearer. The tones somewhat reassured her, for they were quiet and pleasant.

"I *should* like to know where the little beast comes from," one of the invisible beings remarked; "I never saw anything to beat that attitude. It's not only human, it's classical."

"Classical?" echoed a second voice, which Viola thought not quite so pleasant as the former.

"Our friend means that it possesses the attributes of a class," said a third voice, this one quite different in tone and quality from the other two; there was a slight touch of cock-

ney accent, and an evident struggle with the temptation to say *h*attributes.

"Quite so; you always know what I mean, Foster," said the first voice; "that poodle has the manners of the highest circles; quite clear that he mingles in good society. I must really introduce him to my cousin; she would be charmed with him."

"Lady Clevedon is not without class prejudices," the man called Foster remarked in a judicial manner. "Women of the upper ranks have much to contend with; we must look leniently upon their follies; it is the part of the philosopher to smile, not to rail, at human weakness."

Viola thought this sounded promising for her. This tolerant person, at any rate, would be on her side, if she were found guilty of the human weakness of trespassing.

"We must not forget," the philosopher pursued, "that only a limited responsibility can be attached to the human being in his present relations with the universe. Without plunging into the vexed question of Free Will, which has set so many thinkers by the ears, we must admit that our freedom *can* only exist, if at all, in a certain very modified degree. We are conscious of an ability to *choose*, but our choice is, after all, an affair of temperament, and our temperament a matter of inherited inclinations, and so forth, modified from infancy by outward conditions."

"We are not compelled to do things, only we must," some one interposed a little impatiently.

The philosopher laughed.

"Quite so, Mr. Dendraith; we are compelled by ourselves; the 'Ego' constrains itself, and I don't see how we can logically retreat from that position."

"Well, I for one am quite prepared to do it *ill*ogically!"

This idea seemed to stun the philosopher, who made no reply.

At the mention of the word *Dendraith* Viola's heart stopped beating. The memory of that visit to Upton Court still rankled, and her hands clenched themselves fiercely at the remembrance. Presently, to her horror and surprise, the enemy came in sight, followed by his companions. They could not see her, for she was hidden behind the flight of steps.

They had strolled on till they came to one of the great windows, and here they established themselves in a group, Philip Dendraith sitting in the deep embrasure, digging out weeds from between the stones with the end of his stick; Harry Lancaster leaning against the masonry with his head thrown back; while the philosopher, a small fair man with a little face and big forehead, sat huddled together on a large stone, amidst a tangle of weedy vegetation, the tips of his fingers joined, and his head meditatively on one side. His hands showed that he had been engaged in manual work. He was

pale, and spare; and he wore a small, very fair beard and moustache. His eyes were light blue and exceedingly intelligent.

Against the background of gleaming sea the figure of Philip Dendraith, framed by the rough Norman window, stood out very strikingly. Every line was strong and flowing, and the face laid equal claims to admiration.

Yet, perfect as it was, it by no means lacked strength or individuality, as handsome faces often do. There was only too much strength in the thin delicate lips, and in the square jaw which gave vigour to the face, without heaviness. The eyes were rather small and close-set; keen in expression. Dark, sleek hair, closely cropped, harmonised with a smooth, brown and colourless skin; a laugh or smile displayed a set of miraculously white teeth, even and perfect as if they had been artificial. As often happens, this last perfection gave a singularly cold expression to the face; after the first shock of admiration (for it was nothing less), this became chillingly apparent, but the eye still lingered on the chiselled outlines with a sort of fascination. Philip Dendraith seldom smiled, but when he did the smile had always the same character. It was steely and brilliant, with a lurking mockery not pleasant to encounter. His manners, young man as he was, were very polished; he was by instinct a courtier.

"If the fellow were going to murder you," Harry Lancaster used to say, "he would bow you into an easy-chair, so that you might have it done comfortably."

It would have been hard to find two men more unlike than Philip Dendraith and Harry Lancaster.

Cold, keen, self-reliant, fascinating, Philip compelled admiration, and to certain natures his personality was absolutely dazzling. Power of all kinds is full of attraction, and power this young man possessed in no common degree. Already he was beginning to exercise an almost boundless influence over women, whose education—the potent, unconscious education of their daily lives—tends to exaggerate in them the universal instinct to worship what is strong.

Harry Lancaster's charm, curiously enough, lay partly in the absence of certain qualities that made the other man so attractive. He had none of those subtle flatteries which were so pleasant even when they could not be supposed to proceed from real feeling, but he was genial, ready to help, quick to foresee and avoid what might wound another's feelings; daring, nevertheless, in the expression of unpopular opinion to the last extreme.

In Philip's suavities there often lurked a hidden sting—so well hidden that it could not be openly resented, yet full of the bitter poison of a sneer.

It was in his nature to despise men and women, and to rule them through their weakness for his own ends.

"As we were saying, then, before our friend's inordinate

laughter interrupted our cogitations," the philosopher remarked, taking up the lost thread of conversation with his usual pertinacity—"as we were saying, Realism as opposed to Nominalism is doomed to extinction under the powerful"——

"Paw," suggested Philip.

"Paw of Science?" said Caleb Foster dubiously. "The metaphor seems crude."

"But powerful, like the Paw," said Philip, sending a pebble spinning over the window-ledge into the sea.

"Science," pursued Caleb, weighing his words, "is the enemy of poetry and mysticism"——

"I doubt that," said Harry, "I think it has a poetry and mysticism of its own."

"That point we must lay aside for after-discussion," returned the clear-headed Caleb quietly.

"Better put that aside, certainly," observed Philip.

"Science views Nature as a vast concourse of atoms constrained only by certain eternal vetos (if one may so speak), and out of the general co-ordination of these vetoed units arise the multiplex phenomena that we see around us."

Viola leant forward eagerly, trying hard to understand.

"The vetos may be of the simplest character, but however simple and however few, a complex result must arise from their grouping under the conditions. Given the alphabet, we get a literature. There you have the doctrine of Necessity in a nutshell."

Philip turned his small eyes languidly on the speaker.

"And—what then?" he asked.

"What then?" echoed the philosopher. "Having got rid of misleading conceptions, philosophy migrates to new pastures. We no longer speak of life as if it were some outside mysterious influence that pours into dead matter and transforms it; we believe that there is no such independent imponderable, but only different states of matter arising from forces within itself."

"And anything that goes on outside the pale of our cognition——?" asked Philip, slightly raising his eyebrows.

"Such things," said Harry, "are, philosophically speaking, not 'in Society;' one doesn't hear about them; one doesn't call upon them; they are not in our set."

The philosopher seemed a little puzzled. He smiled a melancholy smile and looked pensively out to sea.

Philip was still engaged in sending small stones spinning into the void, and he had gradually worked himself so far towards the outer edge that half his body appeared to be overhanging the sea, which lay immediately below the window.

"I say, you'll very soon be 'not in our set' yourself if you don't look out," said Harry.

Philip laughed, and swung himself round, so that now he

was sitting with both legs over the farther edge of the embrasure. He seemed to revel in the danger. Viola turned cold as she saw him lean half out of the window, in the effort to descry a ship on the horizon.

"Instantaneous death is not, strictly speaking, a calamity," observed the irrepressible philosopher; "the mind has no time to dwell upon the idea of its own destruction. Pain, mental or physical, is the sole misfortune that can befall a man, and this is incompatible with unconsciousness."

"Well, then, Foster, suppose you give me the pleasure of treating you as I treat these pebbles; let me flick you dexterously into the ocean."

But the philosopher laughed knowingly, and shook his head.

"Reason is not our ruling attribute," he said; "sentiment is the most powerful principle in the human breast."

"Come out, will you?" cried Philip, apostrophising an obstinate pebble which had wedged itself tightly in between two blocks of stone. "I *will* have you out; the thing imagines it is going to beat me!"

"Have you never been beaten?" inquired Harry.

"No; nor do I intend to be, by man, woman, or child," Philip answered, with a screw of the lips as he at last forced out and flung away the refractory pebble.

His manner gave one the impression that so he would treat whomsoever should resist him. The mixture of indolence and invincible determination that he displayed was very singular.

Caleb Foster expressed an idea that was passing through Harry's mind when he said, disjointedly, as if thinking aloud, "Given with this temperament, irresponsible power, absence of control—lessons of life artificially withheld—result, a Nero."

"Are you calling me a Nero?" asked Philip, with a laugh. "Nothing like philosophy for frankness. What's my sin?"

"Ask your conscience," returned Caleb. "*I* know of none."

"My conscience has struck work," said Philip; "I gave it so much to do that I tired it out."

Caleb gave a thoughtful nod.

"I believe that it may indeed become obscured by overexercise," he said. "The simple human impulses of truth and justice are, after all, our surest guides. Too subtle thinking on moral questions makes egoists and straw-splitters of us, and hands us over to the mercies of our fallible judgments."

"And why not?" asked Harry. He insisted—much to Viola's consternation—that goodness and intelligence are really identical, and that one of them could never lag far behind the other.

"Granted their close affinity," said Caleb, "but it does not follow that the most reasonable man is also the most moral. Morality is not evolved afresh in each human being by a

logical exercise. It is the result of a long antecedent process of experiment which has embedded itself, so to speak, in the human constitution, so that morality is, as it were, reason preserved"——

"Apt to have a bad flavour, and to be sometimes poisonous from the action of the tins," added Harry.

The philosopher thought over this for some seconds, with his head very much on one side.

Philip Dendraith had another definition of morality.

"I speak from observation," he said, "and from that I gather that it is immoral to be found out. I can conceive no other immorality."

"Halloa! here's our friend the gentlemanly Poodle!" exclaimed Harry, as that intelligent animal appeared in sight.

Bill Dawkins paused in his headlong career, and stood staring at the group.

"I wonder who your master is," Harry continued, redoubling his blandishments; "perhaps the name is on the collar. Hi, good dog, *rats!!*"

Bill Dawkins pricked up his ears and bore down upon the indicated spot.

The philosopher found that his highly developed forehead had become the destination of a lively shower of earth and small stones, which the dog was grubbing up, sniffing and snorting excitedly. Caleb quietly removed his forehead out of range and stood looking on.

"If the beast hasn't almost upset the Philosopher's Stone!" exclaimed Harry.

Caleb opened his mouth to speak.

"We might find in these efforts a type of the Realist's struggle to lay hold of the abstraction in his own mind, an *eidolon* which he translates into objective existence," he observed, calmly and persistently philosophic. But the young men were too much occupied in cheering on the deluded poodle to heed him.

"No name on the collar," said Harry; "but he's clearly a highly connected animal—well bred too; and he's beginning to see it's a hoax; he's giving it up in despair and registering cynical vows not to the credit of mankind."

"Come here, animal," said Philip.

Bill Dawkins' nostrils moved inquiringly.

"I want some amusement, and I think you can give it me."

As Bill Dawkins did not obey, Philip laid hold of him by the ear and compelled him to come; much to the creature's indignation.

Bringing a piece of string from his pocket, the young man then proceeded to tie the dog's legs together diagonally; his right front paw to his left hind paw, and the other two in the same way.

The result, when he was set down again, was a series of agitated stumbles and a state of mind simply frantic. The

sight seemed to afford Philip much joy; he looked on and laughed at the creature's struggles.

"This is a subtle and penetrating form of wit," Harry remarked, with a frown; but Caleb Foster seemed amused at the animal's embarrassment, good-natured man though he was.

"He'd make a good target," remarked Philip, taking aim at the poodle with a small stone, and following up with a second and a third in rapid succession. The last one hurt; for the dog gave a loud yelp, and Harry, flushing up, was springing to the rescue, when an angry cry rang through the air, and almost at the same instant the dog was encircled by a pair of small arms, and hugged and caressed as even that well-appreciated poodle had never been caressed in his life before.

"By the Lord Harry, it's the little Sedley girl!"

CHAPTER VII.

MURDER.

FRANTICALLY Viola tore off the string that bound the creature's legs, and then turning fiercely to Philip, she said, with quivering lips, white with passion, "How dare you ill-treat my dog? How dare you? You are a cruel wicked man, and I hate you!"

"Well done, little virago," said Philip, laughing. "Now tell one who has your welfare sincerely at heart, how did you get here all by yourself?"

"Why did you throw stones at Bill Dawkins? You are cruel—you are wicked; I think you are Satan."

There was a shout of laughter at this.

"Well, I *have* had two good compliments this afternoon!" Philip exclaimed, still laughing; "to be called Nero and Satan within half-an-hour is something to remember oneself by!"

"Poor, good dog! poor, poor dog!" cried the child, almost in tears, and stooping again to caress him.

"Your dog is not much hurt, little girl," said Harry, kindly. "See, he is wagging his tail quite cheerfully; he knows it is all right."

"He always forgives very easily," said Viola. "*I* wouldn't forgive that man if I were he."

"Now, do you know, little lady, I believe you are mistaken," said Philip, with one of his brilliant smiles; "I wouldn't mind betting that the time will come when you would forgive me

far greater offences than this one against your poodle. You belong to the forgiving sex, you know."

"No, I don't," cried Viola, fiercely.

"Do you mean to say, for instance, that you haven't forgiven me for kissing you that afternoon at our house? You were very angry at the time, but you are not angry about that now—are you?"

Viola's face was a study.

Philip threw back his head and laughed at the look of helpless passion which made the child almost speechless.

"There is some mettle here," he said, addressing the others; "a highly spirited young animal who would be worth breaking in when she grows up. Women of this type love their masters."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Harry, as he bent down and tried to soothe the excited little girl, and to find out how she came to be here alone.

"Life," said the philosopher, with amiable intent, "is beset with inevitable disturbances of the mental equilibrium (perhaps the child does not understand the word *equilibrium*—let us therefore substitute *balance*). These, however, it is possible to reduce to a minimum by a habit of mind which—— but I fear I fail to impress our little friend. No matter. In early years the human being is the creature of impulse; reason has not yet ascended the throne. We must be content to be the sport of circumstances. Are you content to be the sport of circumstances, my good child?"

Viola looked shy and shook her head.

"The little woman is a treasure!" exclaimed Philip, laughing. "Now I want to make you say you forgive me," he went on, unexpectedly stooping down and lifting her into the window embrasure, where he established himself in his old perilous position with Viola struggling in his arms.

"I say, do look out," cried Harry. "A mere breath would send you into the sea."

Philip treated these warnings with contempt.

"Now, listen to me," he said quietly, as he quelled the child's struggles with a clever movement; "it is of no use fighting, for I am stronger than you; but I don't want to make you stay here against your will; I want you to stay willingly, and to say that you forgive me, and that you like me very much."

"I hate you," said Viola.

"Oh! no you don't," cried Philip in a low, soft voice; "you can't hate a poor man who thinks you a nice, dear little girl, and wants you to be fond of him. That wouldn't be fair, would it?"

Viola was silent: he had struck the right chord.

"If I had known the dog belonged to you, I wouldn't have tied his legs together or thrown stones at him;—(though they

were very little stones, you know). Now won't you forgive me if I say I am very sorry ?"

"No," said Viola. "Let me go."

Philip gave a deep sigh.

"You pain me very much," he said. "What can a man do when he has offended but say he is sorry and will never do it again ?"

"Let me go," repeated Viola.

"I say, Philip, you are teasing the child," remonstrated Harry.

"No, I'm not; I want to make amends to her, and see if she has a nice disposition."

"You want to experiment with your diabolical power," muttered Harry.

"Now, Viola," Philip continued (his voice was very soothing and caressing), "you see how repentant I am, and how anxious I am to be forgiven; I want you just to say these words after me, and to give me a kiss of pardon when you have said them. These are the words: 'Philip Dendraith, though you have behaved very badly, yet because you are fond of me, and repent, I forgive you, and I kiss you in sign of pardon.' When you have said that I will release you."

"I won't say it," said Viola.

"Oh! but I am sure you will. You know that it would be right and just to say it. I know your mother teaches you to be forgiving, and that you will forgive. See, I am so sure of it that I open my arms and leave you at liberty."

He released her, and waited with a smile to see what she would do. She stared at him in a dazed manner. His arguments had bewildered her; she felt that she had been trusted, and that it would be dishonourable to betray the trust; and yet—and yet the man had no right to interfere with her liberty. There was a vague sense that his seemingly generous confidence had something fraudulent in it, though it placed him in a becoming light.

A look of pain crossed the child's face, from her certainty of this, and her utter inability to put it into words. Few people know how cruelly children often suffer from this inequality in their powers of apprehension and expression.

"It's not fair," was all she could say. However, Philip had so far gained his point that she did not take advantage of her freedom to leave her tormentor; she only shrank away as far as she could, and sat with her head pressed against the stonework of the window.

The partial victory made Philip's eyes glisten; it was delicious to him to use his power, and he already regarded Viola as an adversary worthy of his mettle, child though she was.

Harry, thinking she was reconciled to the situation, abandoned thoughts of interference, and Philip, with much tact, forebore to press his advantage. He began to talk about impersonal matters, cleverly spinning stories on the slenderest

thread of suggestion, and so much did he interest the child that she forgot who was speaking, and forgetting that, forgot to be angry.

Philip smiled, and glanced over his shoulder at his companions.

"The forgiving sex!"

"Tell me some more, please," said Viola, in a dreamy tone.

"Once upon a time," Philip went on obediently, "this old castle stood six miles inland, before the sea bit its way up to it and bombarded it as it is doing now. At that time it was one of the finest castles in England, and the barons who owned it were very powerful. I fear they were rather a quarrelsome lot; we hear of them having endless rows with other nobles, and one of them, not content with his own wife, must needs take away the wife of one of his neighbours; and the neighbour was annoyed about it, and challenged him to single combat, and they hacked at one another for a whole afternoon in plate armour (electro-plate, you know, not real silver). It was a dreadful scene."

"And what happened?" asked Viola breathlessly.

"Well, the other baron ran his lance through Lord Dendraith's arm, and he said, 'A hit, a very palpable hit;' but the baron, putting his lance in his left hand, came on again, swearing diabolically, and this time he unhorsed my ancestor and smashed in his helmet, and then he gave him a deep wound in the leg, and soon the tilting ring was swimming in gore, for the two men were both wounded. The bystanders noticed that it was very blue in colour, the barons being both of noble blood. But in spite of their wounds they swore they wouldn't give in, and up sprang Lord Dendraith onto his horse, and up sprang Lord Burleigh onto his, and the clang of their armour when the lances came down upon it could be heard within a radius of fifteen miles. The people at that distance took it for the sound of threshing flails in the vicinity, and were not interested."

"And then?" said Viola.

"Then," continued Philip, "the battle raged so fiercely that even the fierce members of the Dendraith family were seen to tremble; the plumes of their helmets actually quivered, and a murmur of rustling feathers ran round the crowded ring when for a second there was a pause in the combat. The blows were falling so fast now that there was nothing to be seen but a sort of blurr in the air in the path of the flashing lances."

"Oh!" exclaimed Viola, horror-stricken.

"'By heaven! I swear I will fight thee to the death!'" roared Lord Burleigh.

"'The devil be my witness, I will follow thee to hell!'" bellowed Lord Dendraith.

"And so they fell to with fresh vigour. The two men were very equally matched, and when one inflicted a wound, the

other retaliated with an exactly corresponding injury; when one chopped off a particular portion of his enemy, the other chose the same portion and lopped it off likewise; so that they worked each other gradually down, and it seemed as if they were going to finish the fight with the mere fragmentary remains of what were once exceedingly fine men.

"When at last each had driven his lance into the other's right lung and unhorsed him, the bystanders interfered, and suggested that the noble barons having already lost several limbs, besides cracking their skulls, and mutually causing their teeth (with a few not-worth-mentioning exceptions) to strew the ground, they might consider their honour satisfied; especially as their present plight rendered further fighting highly unsuitable

"But the furious barons would not hear of it; they declared they had never felt better in their lives, and with a violent effort they dragged themselves to their feet (they had now only two between them), and each with his dying breath dealt the other a death-blow. And that was the famous combat between Lord Dendraith and the Lord of Burleigh," concluded Philip.

"Is that the end?" asked Viola.

"Yes; though I may mention that the widows shortly afterwards married again."

Viola remained silent and thoughtful; the tragic ending of the tale weighed upon her.

"One can see where you get your absurd obstinacy from," said Harry.

"I don't own to being obstinate," returned Philip; "obstinacy is the dullard's quality. I have tried to avoid it, as I fancy it is in the Dendraith race."

"Who were anything but dullards," Caleb threw in.

Philip bowed.

"They improved towards later times," he said. "Some foreign blood came into the family, and, rather curiously, it developed on a substratum of the old stubborn, stupid spirit a subtlety almost Italian. Andrew, who repaired part of the castle and built the house, combined these qualities very strikingly. He murdered his sweetheart, you know, little lady," Philip went on, seeing that Viola was interested, "because he found that she liked another man better than she liked him, and no Dendraith could stand that. He offered her his love, and she coquetted a little with him for a time, and then"——

"What is coquetted?" asked Viola.

"Well, she wouldn't say plainly whether she liked him or not; but he swore that she should be his or no other man should have her. Unluckily, he found she had a more favoured lover, and then and there, without foresight or consideration, he stabbed her. The other more cunning side of his character showed itself afterwards in his clever manner

of eluding detection for years. The truth never came out till he told it himself on his deathbed. It is said, of course, that the ghost of the murdered lady haunts the castle to this day."

"Is this your castle?" asked Viola, after a long and thoughtful pause.

"No, it is my father's at present; but he is going to give it me as soon as I marry. It used to be a fine place, and it can be made so again. So you see, Viola, I am worth making friends with. Perhaps when you grow up, if you are good, I will marry you! What do you say to that?"

"I don't want to marry you," said Viola, her old resisting spirit roused again.

"What! not after all the nice stories I have told you?"

"No," said Viola curtly.

"Not to become mistress of the castle, and to have that big house and garden for your own, and some beautiful diamonds that I would give you?"

She shook her head.

"This is *not* like the sex," Philip observed, with a laugh. "Think how nice it would be to have a big house all to yourself, and diamonds, and a husband who will tell you stories whenever you asked him! The luxury of that can scarcely be overrated. You had better think seriously of this matter before you refuse me; there will be a great many others only too delighted to have a chance of all these good things."

"Husbands with a turn for narrative being proverbially popular," Harry threw in.

"And husbands with a turn for diamonds still more so," Philip added. "I am sure that Viola will see these things more wisely as she grows older. So confident am I of it, in fact, that I intend to regard her from this time forth as my little betrothed"——

Philip laughed at the flash that come into the child's eyes. Presently he went on in a coaxing tone: "Now, Viola, you are going to be nice and kind, and say you are fond of me, and give me a kiss, aren't you? Remember, I let you go free when I might easily have kept you prisoner all this time."

"I think your arms would have ached by now if you *had*," observed Caleb, with a chuckle.

Viola had drawn herself together as if preparing to spring to the ground and escape, but Philip quickly frustrated her design. She was still untrammelled, but a strong arm across the window barred the egress.

She tried to push it away, but she might as well have tried to break down the Norman stonework against which the large well-formed hand was resting. She beat it angrily with her clenched fists.

"Oh! that's naughty!" cried Philip, much amused. "Supposing you were to hurt me?"

"I want to!"

Viola continued to strike the hand and arm with all her might.

"Now, you know, there is but one cure for this sort of thing," said Philip, with a brilliant smile.

Relaxing the tension of the obnoxious arm, he placed it round the child, and drew her towards him, saying that he must give her a mixed kiss, combining the ideas of punishment and betrothal.

"Upon my word, you *will* be over that precipice if you don't look out!" warned Harry again.

"Pooh! I'm all right," said Philip impatiently.

Expecting Viola to struggle away from his clutches, he had adjusted his attitude accordingly, but instead of this she flung herself wildly upon him with rage-begotten strength, and before he could recover from the shock, in his dangerous position, he had completely lost his balance. The whole thing was over in an instant.

"Good God! he's gone!" exclaimed Harry, springing into the embrasure with one bound, followed by Caleb.

The two men looked in each other's white faces for a second of awful silence.

Harry leant back against the stonework with a breathless groan, drawing his hand across his brow.

He was on the very spot where, a second ago, Philip had been lolling in his indolent way, defying the danger that lay within an inch of him, the danger that Harry had warned him against in vain.

The unceasing lapping of the waves on the cliff below made the moment absolutely ghastly. It was like the licking of the lips of some animal that has just devoured his victim.

"What's to be done? He *can't* be killed!" cried Harry at last. It seemed incredible. Caleb laid his arm round the young man's shoulders, and together they peered over the verge.

White and pitiless the cliff dropped dizzily to the sea. Philip was an athlete and a splendid climber, but who could keep footing on such a palace s this?

The only hopeful sign was, that they saw nothing of the body. The cliff was not perpendicular; that gave another faint consolation.

They had forgotten all about Viola in the horror of the moment, but the sound of low, passionate sobbing recalled her presence to their minds.

"I have killed him; I have killed him," she moaned in accents so utterly heart-broken, that they sent a horrified thrill through the hearts of her companions. There was something so grief-experienced in the despair of the child; almost it seemed as if she were bewailing the inevitable accomplishment of a foreknown doom. She might have been the heroine of some Greek tragedy crying "αἰ αἰ" at the fulfilment of her fate.

Harry tried to soothe her.

"Oh! find him, find him: he is not killed; he cannot be killed," she wailed. "Come and find him; come and find him."

Feverishly she took Harry's hand to lead him away.

"It was my fault; I have killed him. Come—come!"

In pursuit of a most forlorn hope the three set out together, under Caleb's guidance, he being familiar with the cliffs, and able to lead them by comparatively easy descents to the foot of the rock.

Viola was most anxious to go all the way, but Harry told her that she would delay him and Caleb in their search, and this alone induced her to stay and watch from above.

Rough steps had been hewn out of the rock in places, to enable people living in the castle to get down easily to the sea, and these now proved of immense value, though at best it was dangerous work, and very exciting. The slightest slip would have been punished with death. Now and then they had to take little jumps from ledge to ledge, or to crawl on their hands and knees, clinging for dear life. They stood still now and then to rest, and to shout at the top of their voices in case Philip, by some miracle, had been saved and might answer them. But no answer came.

"It does not seem to me quite impossible that he should have broken his fall by means of some of these inequalities in the side of the cliff. The absolute smoothness vanishes on closer acquaintance."

It was Caleb who spoke.

"And there is an inclined plane here," Harry observed; "steep, indeed, but one's momentum would be checked in striking it."

"Certainly; and Philip is the man to have that good fortune, if any man *could* have it; and to take advantage of it."

Cheering themselves with these suppositions, they slowly continued their journey.

The sun was sinking, and sent a fiery line of gold across the water, dazzling them with its brilliancy, and making their difficult task more difficult still. The gulls were wheeling overhead, congregating and settling on the waters with beautiful airy movements. It made the two men feel giddy to look at them. Glancing towards the fatal window, whither Viola had returned to sit tremulously watching, it struck Harry that if he and Caleb were both to be killed, the child would be without a protector.

Standing on a narrow ledge of rock, he shouted up to her, "Throw down a small stone if you hear me."

A pebble came straight as a plummet-line from the window, striking the inclined plane, bounding up and taking a curved path thence into the sea, which it entered with a faint little plump.

"If we should not return, go at once to the coastguard sta-

tion—it's not two hundred yards off; tell them who you are; ask them to take care of you for the night, and send a message to your home that you are safe. Another stone if you hear; two stones if only partly."

Two stones came down and behaved in the same manner as before. The advice was repeated, and then a single stone fell in token of understanding.

With an encouraging wave of the hand, Harry pursued his perilous journey.

From above, the cliff had appeared smooth and uneventful, but now a thousand secrets betrayed themselves.

Caleb was working his way towards a part of the rock that lay at present out of sight below the inclined plane. Struck by the action of the pebble, it had occurred to him that Philip's body might have followed the same route, but being heavier in comparison with its momentum, would not have described a parabola (as the philosopher put it to himself), but would have fallen or slipped onto the surface immediately below. If here, by some good luck, there were a resting-place, hope still remained.

This idea Caleb communicated to Harry, who checked an impulse to pass on the encouraging view to Viola. It was a pity, he thought, to rouse her hope on such slender grounds.

The search had by this time insensibly changed its character in Harry's eyes. He now regarded it partly as it affected the mind of the little girl whose passionate action had caused the mishap. Her remorse and horror had been terrible to witness, and Harry felt that if Philip proved to be really killed the shock to her might prove to be very dangerous indeed. Her conduct that afternoon had showed him of what sort of stuff she was made.

This was a nature, like a deep sea, capable of profound disturbances.

At that time Harry had not learnt that the nature with material for such storms has generally within it also a strange cohesion and power of endurance which enable it to stand together through crises that would seem more than enough to shatter the most firmly knit intellect.

"Look out," Caleb called back to his companion, as a stone rolled down the slope; "you are coming to an awkward place now."

Harry found that he stood on a projecting ledge of rock, where below him for about twenty feet there was no further resting-place; to the left rose a buttress of rock; to the right the ledge shelved away to nothing, the slight foothold dwindling till it disappeared altogether.

"How in the name of wonder did you get past here?" he called to Caleb.

"I climbed up a little, and got round the projection on the other side; but the bit of stone I got up by gave way under

my feet, and I fear you will have to stay where you are for the present."

As this fact was borne in upon him, Harry cursed his ill luck. He looked about and around in every direction for a means of escape, but there was absolutely none. The loosened flint that had enabled Caleb to climb the escarpment lay resting on the slope of rock below him twenty feet. Now nothing but a rope from above could enable a man to scale the acclivity. The prisoner looked anxiously at the sun. Nothing could be done when the darkness came on, and if it should overtake him he would have to stay here all night, unable to lie down, scarcely able to turn,—it was not a pleasant prospect.

"I can't possibly get out of this position without help," he called out; "how are you getting on?"

"I am working my way to the place I told you of; I shall soon be there. If I find him, I will shout to you; and we can consult as to what is to be done. Perhaps the little girl could find you a rope somewhere about the house. There is one in my kitchen,—do what you can as to that; meanwhile I will not forget you. The sun won't be down for another two hours yet."

With these words Caleb passed entirely out of sight, and Harry was left to solitude and his own reflections.

He shouted up to Viola above, and was answered by a tiny pebble.

"We want a rope," he called up. "Will you go to Caleb's house and bring one that you will find there in the kitchen? His house is in the castle keep; it has been repaired and made into a dwelling for him; it stands at the end of the castle, right out to sea—you can't mistake it."

"I understand," was signalled back in pebble language.

Harry knew that the child's anxious misery would be relieved by action, and, besides, her help might be very valuable. The thought of her strange and terrible situation at this moment recurred to him with increasing insistence. Philip Dendraith had been to Harry only a newly made acquaintance, and his accident affected him little more than if it had befallen a total stranger. There was no personal grief in his heart, and he was therefore free to speculate on the feelings of one more tragically interested. He was beginning to feel anxious about her, for he doubted if she could be persuaded to leave the spot until Philip had been found, and there was the sun racing towards the horizon, and still Caleb gave no sign.

Everything depended upon him.

Viola found the rope, and as soon as she returned Harry directed her to go to the coastguard station for help. She was to ask to have the news forwarded to the Manor-House and Upton Court, and also to bring some brandy.

Pebbles came down in token of understanding, and the little

figure disappeared from the window. Harry found himself alone in the hushful twilight.

It seemed as if Nature were doing her utmost to soothe his anxieties and whisper messages of peace in his ears. Long lines of cloud and sea swept serenely from coast to distant coast; the sunset lights were rich and glowing, promising a glorious morrow; while at the cliff's foot the glassy waters lapped with a soft sea-sound that might have lulled the frenzy of a madman's dream.

Harry felt the influences steal into his heart, and as the glow grew fainter in the sky, and the cold evening light—almost electric in its still lustre—crept over the waters, he realised with a start that the last quarter of an hour had been one of the happiest of his life. Full of emotions, of delicious insights and longings, it had brought to him, upon the inflowing tide of heightened consciousness, a thrilling sense of the glory and the sweetness of existence.

Then for the first time he fully realised the tragedy that had occurred that afternoon; a strong fresh life hurried perhaps into dark unconsciousness, with all its infinite possibilities blotted out.

Away "pale Philosophy," which would persuade the life-intoxicated soul that death is no calamity!

Death is *the* great calamity towards which our sins and our errors are for ever thrusting us. Life—full, rich, wide-spreading life—the one great universal Good, in whose delicious ocean all right and healthy things in heaven and earth are steeped till the sweet waters steal in and fill them through and through. Such was Harry Lancaster's present creed.

A shout broke the stillness.

"I have found him!"

"Alive?"

"Don't know; he does not move;—I am trying experiments."

It was maddening to be imprisoned here when help was so much needed! Harry, for the hundredth time, tried to persuade himself that he could escape by some deed of daring, but had to own that none but suicidal attempts were possible.

He told Caleb that Viola must shortly return with help.

"That's lucky!" shouted the philosopher. "I believe he is alive, though he has been severely knocked about; he is stunned, but he seems to me to breathe still faintly. It is an absolute miracle! I wish I had some brandy. When the little girl returns with help"——

"Ah! well done, well done! Here she is!—and the coast-guardsman himself to the rescue."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Caleb. "Come to me as soon as you can. No time to be lost."

Harry shouted up to the man to let down the brandy and to attach the rope firmly somewhere above. In a few seconds

he had the joy of seeing a quaint-looking flask sliding down the cliff towards him. Quickly detaching the flask, he put it in his pocket, and seizing the rope, swung himself down obliquely, the coastguardsman moving it from time to time along the castle wall. Harry had to guide himself by Caleb's voice, and it was not long before he had scrambled almost to the foot of the cliff, where he found Caleb beside the body of Philip, trying by every means in his power to restore him to life.

Harry sprang to his side and handed him the brandy without a word.

"This may save him," said Caleb, as he raised the body in his arms and administered the life-draught. "Now, there is no time to lose; he must be moved to my house at once, while he is unconscious; after he revives the pain would retard us. His left leg is broken, I fear, and I dare say that is not the only injury, poor fellow! You take his feet, I'll take his head, and forward."

Caleb, giving the word of command, led the way to the beach, the two men carrying the burden for about a quarter of a mile over the shingle, and then up by a rough but moderately easy ascent, at a point where the cliffs were less steep and less lofty. They had perforce to pause for breath now and again, and then the dose of brandy was repeated. At the second pause a faint movement, showing that Philip was still alive, was the signal for moving on at a still more rapid rate.

The distance seemed very great, for Philip was no light burden, and their wishes so far outstripped their powers that progress appeared slow indeed.

"What's that?" said Harry, peering through the dusk. "I think I see two figures coming towards us."

He was right. A few minutes brought them face to face with Viola and the good-natured coastguardsman, who had guessed what the others had done, and came on to lend a hand. He turned Harry off altogether, and insisted on taking his place till he had "got the wind into his sails again," after which Caleb was subjected to a similar process of nautical recuperation.

Before Viola's white lips had time to frame the question, "Is he alive?" Harry had communicated the fact of Philip's almost miraculous escape.

The blood ebbed away from her face for a moment, and then came rushing back again in a great tumult. She said not a word, but kept close beside Philip, watching his still face intently.

"Did you get a message sent to your mother?" Harry inquired.

"Yes; I said I was quite safe, and that you had told me what to do, and were taking care of me. Also I asked her to send on the news, as you told me."

Caleb's hermitage at the far end of the castle was a strange, romantic little dwelling, patched together by his own hands out of the ruined keep; the arrow-holes having been widened into windows, while the old spiral staircase still served the ingenious philosopher as a means of reaching his little bedroom, where every night he was lulled to sleep by the ceaseless music of the waves. From this haven of repose the mattress and blankets were brought down to the kitchen, where a good fire was burning; Philip was laid upon the bed close to the hearth, and then Caleb proceeded to apply all his wide and accurate knowledge to the task before him.

While engaged in arduous efforts to restore the lost animation, he was giving explicit directions to his colleagues to assist him, and to collect various things that he required in order to set the broken leg and bind up the wounds.

"He is badly hurt," said Caleb; "but if he lives he will be none the worse for this, if I am not much mistaken."

"Oh, he'll live all right," said the coastguardsman, seeing, with singular quickness, that Viola turned white at the philosopher's "*if*." "There! I saw a quiver of the eyelid. You are breathing your own life into him, Mr. Foster;—he *must* come round. Don't you never be afraid, little 'un," he added, patting Viola on the head; "the young gentleman'll live to be a sorrow to his parents for many a long day yet! You mark my words."

The coastguardsman's prophecy proved true. Caleb, with the assistance of his companions, did, after much effort, succeed in fanning the dim little spark of life to a feeble but certain flame.

Philip opened his eyes, gave a sigh, and sank heavily back on the pillows.

"Now, the leg must be set," said Caleb. "Happily I know how to do it. Now I want you all to be very intelligent," he said, as he bent down to perform the operation of setting the broken leg; "upon my skill and the general good management of the affair hangs the issue of a life-time. If I do not set it with perfect accuracy one leg will be shorter than the other."

There was an anxious silence in the little room as the philosopher, with skilful, decided movements set about the momentous task.

Philip was by this time vaguely conscious of his surroundings, but too weak to ask any questions. Perhaps his rapid mind had taken in the facts without assistance. He very much surprised the bystanders by saying in a weak but clear voice, "Are you going to set my leg, Foster?"

"Yes; we can't wait for a doctor. I have done it before—trust to me."

Almost as he spoke he wrenched the parts into position, and Philip gave a groan.

"The worst is over," Caleb said cheerfully; "brace yourself for another wrench, and then the deed is done."

This time there was only a laboured drawing of the breath from the patient, and then the limb was bound to a bar of wood by means of bands made, on the spur of the moment, out of cloths and towels, and the patient was told that for the present he would be left in peace.

Very quietly and rapidly Caleb made arrangements for the night. The coastguardsman was thanked for his services and assured that no further help was needed. Caleb and Harry would take turns in the night-watch, while Viola could go to bed in the room sanctified by philosophic slumbers, and dream that she was a mermaid playing with her own tail in depth of the green ocean.

So said Harry, recovering already from the afternoon's strain of anxiety and fatigue.

Caleb silenced at once Viola's pleading to be allowed to sit up and watch the patient. Not to-night, he said, or she would be another patient on his hands by the morrow, and then how could Philip be properly nursed ?

"Say good-night to him, little one," said Caleb kindly, "and then I'll take you upstairs."

The child went up to the bed and knelt down by Philip's side. In spite of manful efforts the tears welled up into her eyes, but she made no sound. She seemed to be struggling with herself; her lips moved. Then suddenly she bent forward, uttering Philip's name, and as she bade him good-night she kissed him on the brow.

"I am so sorry; I am so very sorry!"

Philip, weak as he was, gave a slight laugh. The afternoon's event, nearly fatal though it had been, amused him.

"You almost did for me, little one," he said, "but it's all right, and you didn't mean to do it, you know."

Viola turned abruptly away from the bedside, and Caleb, taking her in his arms, carried her tenderly up the dark winding staircase to the strange little room, through whose lozenge-paned windows a faint moon was tracing diamond patterns on the bare floor.

"You won't be frightened here, will you ?" Caleb asked. "Mr. Lancaster and I are in the room below, and should hear you in a minute if you called."

"I shall not be frightened," said Viola.

Yet a thrill of terror went through her when Caleb, having done all he could think of for her comfort, shut the door and left her alone.

The excitement of the day had unstrung her nerves, and the strangeness of the place filled her with alarm.

But it was not this that most disturbed her. There was a terrible something in her consciousness that filled all things with horror; something that had made the very sunshine seem hateful, and now haunted the darkness with faces so

hideous in their mockery that the child grew well-nigh distraught.

"*We* see; *we* know," said the faces, and then they laughed, till Viola, falling on her knees beside the window, prayed as she had never prayed in her life before. But the face of the earth was changed to her since that afternoon; no prayer, no forgiveness, could restore to the sea and sky their friendly benignity. That was all gone, and in its stead were terrible accusations and sinister smiles and laughter. That she herself had altered did not occur to her; she was the same Viola, capable always of the crime that she had this day committed; capable always of—she shrank frantically from the horrible word.

As a man fighting with some wild beast for dear life, this child wrestled, in the loneliness of that little sea-haunted chamber, with a demon born within her own consciousness, who assailed her without pause or mercy through all the waking hours of that dreadful night. It seemed as if this Creature—for living form the unspeakable Idea took in her distraught imagination—were devouring her inch by inch, her and all that she possessed. Her childhood shrivelled up in the blast of his hot breath; her innocence, her childish dreams, her ignorance of the deepest gulfs of human misery. The gates of the great Darkness were opened, and she could already see stretching far away the dim, woeful plains and midnight mountains in whose black chasms human souls lay rent and bleeding. The air was heavy with sighing and lamentation.

Upon how many scenes of human agony had those old grey stones looked down, while the sea sung its eternal requiem to hope and sweet desires? Yet never, perhaps, had they witnessed a struggle more terrible than the succourless soul-travail of this solitary child—a soul battling in the darkness with the image of a great crime, warding off with vain and desperate efforts the memory of a moment's flash of insane fury,—that moment, which had blazed out upon the very sunshine in hues of flame, fierce and crimsoned with the wild image of—*Murder!*

CHAPTER VIII.

A SYMPOSIUM.

THE news of Philip's accident brought, as Harry said, "a large and fashionable circle" to Caleb's little Hermitage. Mrs. Sedley drove over early in her solemn old carriage to fetch her daughter and inquire for Philip. The Clevedon people also trundled across country in their more lively vehicle, but delayed their visit philosophically till the afternoon.

Far from philosophic were the fond parents of Philip, who arrived breathless with a captive doctor at an unearthly hour in the morning; and rushed to their son's bedside with a thousand exclamatory questions. The thought that he might have been killed thoroughly overcame poor Lady Dendraith, who broke into sobs and cries, and had to be removed bodily by Caleb, who was confirmed by the doctor when he said that if she behaved in that way she would soon succeed in completing what the accident had failed by a hair's-breadth to effect.

The examination of the injured leg by the doctor was followed by the cheering announcement that it had been perfectly well set, and that with proper precautions there was no reason to fear any permanent injury.

Viola looked on and listened in the deepest anxiety. She shrank guiltily away from Philip's parents, and answered only by a deep flush when Sir Philip said to her, in rather a severe tone, "I hope this will be a lesson to you not to give way to temper, my child; if it hadn't been for my son's marvellous strength and presence of mind, he would have certainly been killed."

"Indeed, yes," said Lady Dendraith, shaking her head; "passion is a dreadful thing, and always leads to trouble."

There was something ludicrous, if Viola could have seen it, in this plump, well-to-do lady moralising about the evil results of passion; but the child was inaccessible to all ideas of the ludicrous just now; indeed at no time was she very keenly alive to the humorous side of things.

Reluctantly she had to leave the Hermitage and go home with her mother, who promised that she should come and see the invalid as often as the doctor would permit.

Mrs. Sedley did not say a word of reproach to her daughter for her disobedience; she felt that the child had been already severely punished, though she little guessed *how* severely.

The next time that Viola saw Philip he was looking quite strong, and complaining bitterly of the restraint still imposed upon him.

"The doctor says I shall walk again as well as ever, for which all praise to '*mon cher philosophe*,' and the rest of you. Lancaster here behaved like a Trojan. As to the coast-guardsman, he behaved like a true Briton. And Viola—what shall I say of her? Well, she did her very best to make up for pitching me over the cliff in that spirited manner! I can't get over the idea of this mite having actually brought me to death's door! It is really splendid. She will be a fascinating woman when she grows up. It isn't the quiet nondescript women that take one's heart by storm; what men love is life and passion."

"Yes, until they marry," said Harry; "and then if your high-steppers don't calm down into a domestic jog-trot, they are indignant. I once heard a fellow make a curious remark about two sisters: the elder, he said, was the girl to fall in

love with, the younger the one to marry. I expect the woman of the nineteenth century is going to make hay of our cherished institutions."

"We have another great power to deal with besides the nineteenth century woman," said Caleb; "our great immovable middle class."

"True," assented Harry; "and that badly-dressed old sheet-anchor won't stand any nonsense about its cherished institutions. A sense of being tied hand and foot like a Gulliver, gives us a feeling of moral safeness, and is wonderfully conducive to the serenity of the average conscience."

"The 'badly dressed sheet-anchor' (a singular figure, by the way) is a trifle thick-headed; we must calculate on that."

Of such conversations was Viola now often the puzzled hearer, for where Caleb was, there, to a dead certainty, discussion would be also.

His manner towards Viola was a source of perpetual amusement to Philip and Harry. Do what he would, poor man! he found it impossible to project himself into the consciousness of a being who did not understand the nature of a syllogism, and—if Harry was to be believed—he always addressed Viola with deep respect in the language of "pure reason." That young man used to return to Clevedon after a visit to the Hermitage, and amuse his cousin by describing how Caleb in abstract moments of close-knit argument had turned to Viola with some such remark as: "To this you will at once reply that Kant regards our religious beliefs as either *statutory*, that is, arbitrarily revealed, or *moral*, that is, connected with the consciousness of their necessity and knowable *a priori*."

This, no doubt, was one of Harry's exaggerations, but the story was not without some foundation.

Viola was interested in Kant; why, Harry never could understand. He did not realize the natural avidity with which a starved intelligence absorbs any fresh idea, however seemingly unattractive. Mrs. Sedley's careful selection of books for her daughter's reading had the result of making the child eager for mental food of some other flavour; it mattered little what, so long only as it was quite unlike the severely wholesome diet on which she was being monotonously reared.

Besides being introduced to Kant, whom she found a pleasant and intelligent person, Viola made the acquaintance of Socrates, or Mr. Socrates, as Philip gravely insisted he must be called, on the ground that "familiarity breeds contempt."

Harry shocked her greatly by saying, "Well, after all, you know, he is distinctly the greatest bore on record. We should never endure such an old proser now! Think of the way he nagged at those long-suffering people in the Dialogues! I don't wonder that the Athenians resorted in despair to hemlock. As for Xantippe, poor woman! I have always had the deepest sympathy for her. I am certain the

man deranged a naturally fine intellect and destroyed the temper of an angel."

Poor Viola! she scarcely knew what to believe! The mixture of jest and earnest which ran like tangled threads through the whole conversation was most confusing to her. She was utterly unaccustomed to lights and shades of thought, or to quick changes of mental attitude. The three men into whose society she was now thrown opened up a new world of ideas, delightful but bewildering. Caleb's position in the group did not puzzle her as it would have puzzled an older person, but she was interested to learn that he had been discovered by Harry Lancaster in London in a state of terrible privation; that a friendship had sprung up between the two men; and that, finally, Caleb had been installed by Sir Philip at the ruin, of which he was now custodian, keeping it from falling into utter decay, while he took charge of the stables, outbuildings, and gardens belonging to the empty house.

Sometimes Caleb would propose to make the meeting into a genuine symposium, setting glasses on the table and bringing out a bottle of home-made wine with which Lady Dendraith always kept him well supplied.

It was an incongruous group, with an incongruous background, of which Philip on his couch in Caleb's picturesque kitchen formed the central figure.

The shadows and sombre colouring threw the four faces into relief. The splendidly handsome features of the invalid formed a fine nucleus to the picture, and Viola's pale, questioning face, with its strange melancholy, seemed to correspond to that note of sadness which can be caught in all things human, if we listen for a moment, ever so carelessly.

The eagerness with which she waited on Philip was touching, even to those who did not know what lay on her heart; to an onlooker who had guessed that secret the whole scene would have been no less than tragic. Had her sense of guilt been able to overcome her old dislike to Philip, one source of conflict would have disappeared; but it was not so. After the first rush of pitiful remorse, which had drowned for the time every other sentiment, Viola was again assailed by the old antipathy. With this she had continually to struggle, and those who have realised the strange intensity of the child's nature will understand what such a struggle implies.

Philip's bantering, familiarly affectionate manner was stirring up the old angry feelings. A sudden flash of her dark eyes would make him laugh and pretend to cower away as if in fear.

"I'll be good; I'll be good! Don't murder me outright, there's a good child!"

And then the light would die out of her eyes, and she would turn away, perhaps going to the window or to the open door, where she would stand looking out upon the sea.

Mrs. Sedley had permitted, and even encouraged the child

in these visits to the bedside of the invalid, because she regarded them as acts of atonement. The horror of causing a fellow-creature's death had come so near to the child that she could not fail to be deeply impressed by it.

Philip's recovery was very rapid. As soon as he was able to be moved, his mother bore him off in triumph to Upton Court. That broke up "the symposium," as Caleb called it, and finished one of the most exciting chapters in Viola's short life. Her visits to Philip were still continued, but at longer intervals, and under conditions entirely changed. She used to bring him flowers as votive offerings, and sometimes she would shyly offer him some worm or beetle which she imagined must be as valuable in his eyes as in hers.

She tried to discover what his soul most yearned for, whether tadpoles or purple emperors or piping bullfinches, or it might be a retriever puppy! Then she would spend her days trying to gratify his ambition. On one of her visits a round fluffy squeaking object with a damp pink nose was placed in Philip's arms, with the words, "You said the other day that you wouldn't care to live without a retriever puppy; I have brought you one, and you can have four more if you like."

Philip kept the puppy, and said that now he was reconciled to life. By the time he had quite recovered, the small brown creature had lost a good deal of its pulpiness, and might be seen floundering happily about the garden; a charming, lanky, boneless individual, amiable to the point of weakness, playful and destructive beyond all telling. To Viola's delight, Bouncer, as he was called, had the honour of being taken up to Oxford when his master returned thither at the commencement of the term.

After that, things rolled back to their old course: Viola seldom saw the outside of the gates of the Manor, and she had ample opportunity in the stagnant solitude of her home to brood upon the secret that clouded her colourless life. It helped to exaggerate many qualities in her that were already too pronounced, while hastening unduly the maturity of her character.

She made no further attempts to wander out of bounds, and Miss Gripper now seldom caught her climbing trees or engaged in any other unlady-like occupation. She delivered herself over to the influence of her mother, and about eighteen months after Philip's accident she passed through a phase of fervent religious feeling, during which she rivalled in devotion and self-mortification many a canonised saint. Her mother had some trouble in keeping her from doing herself bodily harm, for in her zeal she preferred tasks that gave her pain, and never thought she was well employed unless her occupation was severely distasteful.

She used now rather to enjoy her father's fits of anger, for they gave her an opportunity of showing a saint-like meek-

ness under persecution. At this time her behaviour was a grotesque caricature of her mother's, but Mrs. Sedley did not recognise the portrait. She rejoiced in her daughter's piety, and half-believed, perhaps, that in the service of Heaven one might fly in the face of natural laws with impunity.

Days and weeks passed on; the daily routine was never altered; the only change that marked the course of time at the Manor-House was the presence of a lady who came daily from the town of Upton to carry on Viola's education.

Miss Bowles was a worthy, conscientious, washed-out person who had long said good-bye to joy, and lived a dim struggling, dreary life with lady-like propriety.

She scarcely seemed a real human being; she was the incarnated emblem of sound religious principles, arithmetic for schools, French (with Parisian accent), German (Hanoverian), English Grammar, Composition, and History—all these things and many others Miss Bowles represented;—but try to compound out of them a personality and miserable was your failure! It lay so deeply buried, so thickly incrusted—like some poor bird's nest petrified in the Derbyshire springs—that you searched for it in vain. Perhaps a genial sympathetic person might have warmed it into life once more, but Mrs. Sedley was neither genial nor sympathetic.

Viola applied herself conscientiously to the dry tasks which this lady imposed upon her, associating all that was dull and uninteresting in these daily tables of facts and figures with the neat but certainly not gaudy drab bonnet and pinched-looking jacket of her governess.

Viola was growing now into a slim girl, graceful and swift in her movements, with a reserved, melancholy expression and a rich, sweet voice. Philip Dendraith had prophesied that she would turn out a fascinating woman, but, according to her father, she threatened to be a dead failure.

"How are we going to marry a pale-faced frightened creature like that?" he demanded in his coarse way. "She's only fit for a cloister; and I, for my part, think it's a great pity we haven't got nunneries to send our plain girls to. What's the use of keeping them idling about at home, every one laughing at them because they can't get husbands?"

At such remarks Mrs. Sedley, meek as she was, would wince.

In Mrs. Sedley's simple creed, marriage, no matter under what conditions, was intrinsically sacred, but she would not counsel her daughter to marry for money; that seemed to her very sinful. Yet she knew well that Mr. Sedley would never tolerate for Viola a poor marriage; he had long been resting his hopes of the restitution of the family fortunes upon his daughter; and without reserve he had told his wife what he expected, and what she must exert herself to bring about. Mrs. Sedley watched her child's development with dread; for every day that passed over her was bringing her nearer

to the crisis of her life, the terrible crisis which seemed so far more likely to bring disaster than happiness. And what was the mother's part to be in that fateful moment? Her influence over the girl was supreme: upon her action all would depend.

The responsibility seemed unendurable, the problems of conscience pitiless in the terrible alternatives which they offered to the tortured will.

Suffering, which Mrs. Sedley had borne herself without a murmur, made her tremble when it threatened her child. Yet her teaching to that child was perfectly consistent with the whole tenor of her life: "Endure bravely, and in silence; that is the woman's part, my daughter."

She was ready, with hands that trembled and quailing heart (but she was ready), to give that nerve-thrilled being to the flames—for Duty's sake—and quickly that insatiate woman's Idol was advancing to demand his victim.

Year by year, the state of Mr. Sedley's money-matters grew more hopeless, and a possibility which had long been thought of in secret was at last acknowledged openly between husband and wife. Mrs. Sedley had never seen her husband so deeply moved as when he confessed that they might have to leave the Manor-House, the home where he had lived as a boy, where his father had lived and died, and his ancestors for many a generation. The man was moved almost to tears at the prospect of banishment from the home of his race. Sentiment—like a sudden flame in seemingly dead embers—sprang up on this one subject, though it answered to no other charming.

"If it be in any way possible to avoid it, we will not, we *must* not leave the old place," said Mrs. Sedley earnestly.

"There is only one way to avoid it," he replied; "Viola must make a rich marriage."

"Yes; if she loves the man," Mrs. Sedley ventured to suggest.

"Loves—fiddle-de-dee!" cried Mr. Sedley angrily; "don't talk schoolgirl twaddle to me, madam. What has a well-brought-up young woman to do with love, I should like to know? I have no patience with this spoony nonsense. I call it downright improper. Let a young woman take what's given her and be thankful. Confound it! it's not every woman can get a husband at all!"

With these words ringing in her ears, Mrs. Sedley would look with something approaching terror on the sensitive face of her daughter, who, as she grew more womanly in appearance, seemed to become more than ever shrinking and reserved.

Her father shrugged his shoulders angrily.

"Who's going to marry a girl like that?" he would ask contemptuously; "she looks half-asleep."

With her customary want of tact in appreciating char-

acter, Mrs. Sedley used to confide some of her anxieties to Lady Clevedon, who scoffed long and loudly, not at Mrs. Sedley, but at Viola.

"Dear me; it's very interesting to be so sensitive!—quite a fashionable complaint among girls nowadays. Too sensitive to marry, too sensitive to be mothers! Is there anything that they are *not* too sensitive to be?"

"You know that I cannot answer you if you speak in this vein, Augusta; but Viola gives me great anxiety."

"My dear, something ought to be done; the machinery of the universe must be stopped; it is too coarse and noisy for these highly-strung beings; they can't stand it. Clearly 'gravitation ought to cease when they pass by.'"

CHAPTER IX.

ALTERNATIVES.

In silence, day by day and month by month, the clouds swept over the Manor-House, and silently the scroll of the years unfolded, revealing little, but hinting many things. Nine times the leaves had fallen since Philip's accident, and Geoffrey had now shot up into a gawky, good-natured youth, and his parents began to cast about anxiously in their minds to find him a profession. His hearty loathing of the drudgery of office-work made the choice difficult. Geoffrey would have preferred the army, but his father swore a great many oaths, and declared that he was not going to be bled to death by a lot of idle sons who couldn't live upon their pay. He had had enough of *that*. Manitoba was bruited (for no congenial work nearer home could be heard of), and this, as an alternative in case nothing better offered, Geoffrey had come to regard as his destiny. Meanwhile he remained at home, and was understood to be "looking out for something." The intervals between the times of "looking out" he used to spend in fishing his father's trout-stream, for this was the delight of his soul.

Geoffrey's presence made a great change in Viola's life, and her father began to feel more hopeful about her future achievements after the boy had driven away the dreary depressed look, and summoned in its place an expression of brightness that entirely transfigured the girl's face. Her rich dark skin and black hair, the fine eyes kindling with youthful delights, gave her genuine pretensions to beauty.

It was a sombre beauty; still beauty it was, and of a subtle and haunting kind. During the nine uneventful years which

had ushered in her girlhood Viola had only now and again met either Philip Dendraith or Harry Lancaster. Caleb she occasionally saw. He was still living with his beloved books in his little Hermitage.

Harry had gone to India with his regiment, and Clevedon mourned his exile, and looked forward to his shortly expected return with much joy. The hopeful Philip was reported to be leading a dissipated life in London. His good looks, his brilliant prospects, and his undoubted social talents carried all before him. Whenever Philip was at Upton Court he made an effort to renew his old acquaintance with Viola, being curious to see how she had turned out. But this was no easy task. Shyness, partly hereditary, partly induced by a solitary life, had become almost a disease with her, and she used to flee from her fellow-creatures whenever they approached.

For the third time during a three weeks' visit Philip arrived one afternoon at the Manor-House, and asked for Viola, but she was not to be found. She had seen the visitor arrive, and instantly set off at her utmost speed to the farthest confines of the park, where, shivering with excitement, she lingered for hours and hours, not venturing to go back to the house, in case Philip should still be there. Unfortunately for her, her father happened to be in, and he was so angry when at last she did cautiously return, that she thought he would have struck her. She had never seen him so enraged, although outbursts of this sort after his drinking-bouts were not uncommon. Fury carried the man out of himself, and he said things which even he afterwards owned were "rather strong." Viola listened in silence. She was learning lessons never to be forgotten to her dying day, lessons which perhaps every woman has to learn in some form or another, but which few are fated to be taught in so many words by their own fathers.

In the name of Heaven and common-sense, how did she expect to get a husband if she behaved in this addle-headed manner? Half the women in London were ready to throw themselves into Philip Dendraith's arms, and yet Viola would not condescend to the common politeness of coming to see him when he called! She had run away on purpose, of course; it was an old trick of hers, very girl-like and engaging, no doubt, but might one make a polite request that these graceful little exhibitions of coyness might not occur again? Coyness before a man had made any advances at all, was what one might call dangerously premature.

"You are not a queen of beauty, let me tell you, that you can afford to indulge in these womanish devices. My doors are not besieged with suitors for your hand."

"Not want to marry? Not want to marry?" Mr. Sedley yelled, with a burst of fury. "You—you—miserable little fool! Do you know what you are saying? Can't you speak? Can't you say something instead of standing there before me

like a block of wood? And pray, what do you think would be the use of you if you didn't marry? What can you do but loaf dismally about the place and serve as a wet blanket to every one's enjoyment? What's the good of a woman but to marry and look after her husband and children? What can she do else? Tell me that, if you please. Do you hear me, Viola?"

"I would try and earn my own living," said Viola at last in a low, trembling voice.

"*Earn you own living!*" echoed her father, with a shout of laughter. "*You* earn your own living! And pray, in what profession would you propose to become a shining light? The army, the navy, the Church, the law? Or would you perhaps enter upon the field of politics? Everything is open to you; you have only to choose. And you know such a lot, don't you? You are so learned and capable, so well able to force your way in the world. Oh! pray don't think of marrying; a far more brilliant and congenial career lies before you."

Viola answered nothing; she was suffering too keenly, miserably realizing that in her father's mockery lay a deadly truth; that she had, in fact, nothing to reply but, "Thou hast said it."

What was she? What did she know! What had she seen? What could she do? To all this there was only one answer: Nothing. Books had been forbidden her, human society had been cut off from her; scarcely had she been beyond the gates of her home, except once or twice when she had gone for change of air to Wales or Yorkshire, or for a day now and then to London to see "the sights"!

"O mother, it was cruel!" From the depths of her heart that bitter cry went up, the first word or thought of reproach that had ever arisen there for that much-adored and devoted mother. And this was the result of all those anxious days, those fervent prayers, that ceaseless self-denial! By her own father, she was taunted with her helplessness, and reminded not only that the sole career open to her was marriage, but that she must make deliberate efforts to secure it for herself, or at any rate must aid and abet in schemes which others undertook on her behalf. She must bestir herself in the matter, for it was her appointed business.

In after-life Viola learnt about the outcast of her sex—facts which at this time were unknown to her; but that revelation was not more painful, nor did it even strike her as very different from what she had learnt to-day about the lot of women who were *not* outcast, but who took upon themselves to cast out others.

The girl's stunned silence irritated her father beyond endurance.

"In the name of Heaven, why can't you speak, girl?" he thundered; "it's your confounded obstinacy; and you get it from your mother. But we have to see yet who is master.

Understand that I mean to endure no more of this nonsense, and the next time you are asked to appear in the drawing-room, you will please to do so, and make yourself pleasant to the visitor into the bargain. Too much of this accursed nonsense would land you high and dry, a burden to me for life."

Viola drew a quick breath.

"Yes, a burden, a dead weight, hanging like a millstone round my neck." Do you know what a woman is who does not marry? I will tell you: she is a cumberer of the ground, a devourer of others' substance, a failure, a wheel that won't turn; she is in the way; it were better she had never been born. She is neglected, despised, left out; and who cares whether she is alive or dead? She is alone, without office, without object, without the right to exist. If you are minded to choose such a lot, at least you shall do it with your eyes open. A woman who is not performing her natural duties, serving her husband and her children is an absurdity,—an anomaly, a ramrod without a gun, a key without a lock, a—a—ship without a sail—she's—she's a DAMNED NUISANCE!" roared Mr. Sedley, with a final burst of fury, as he turned on his heel and stamped out of the room, banging the door so ferociously that it shook the old house from cellar to roof.

"The master's been drinking again," announced the butler to the inmates of the servants' hall.

It was in the drawing-room that this stormy interview took place; the chill, ghostly old room where the lost souls dwelt and the Spirit of Music held her court. It was a dreary day; Philip had chosen it for his call, thinking that Viola was likely to be home. Outside, old William was weeding the gravel in his usual steady, patient way; the ceaseless chop-chop of his hoe, regular as the dropping of water, sounded strangely forlorn in the silence.

Viola stood for full five minutes exactly where her father left her, with her eyes fixed upon the dull forms of the mist-dimmed trees, upon the melancholy avenue whose few remaining leaves awaited the first breath of wind to fall shivering to the sodden ground. The girl flung herself into the nearest chair and buried her face in the cushions. She was shaken from head to foot, but not a sound escaped her. Grief which finds its easiest expression in tears was reserved for souls less passionate.

There was something frantic in her present distress; she was like a hunted creature at bay. Her position, as represented by her father's words, seemed utterly unbearable, utterly humiliating. Why had her parents forced existence upon her if it was to be one long degradation? Better indeed that she had never been born! "Better, ah! better a thousand times," old William's patient hoe seemed to say, as it beat its rhythm on the gravel without; "better, a thousand times, a thousand times!"

With a strange desperate pleasure in self-torture, the girl

placed the whole picture clearly before her mind; showing herself exactly how she stood, how helpless she was, how closely the two alternatives of the woman's lot encompassed her. On the next occasion that Philip called, it would beseem her to put on her best frock and her best smile, and try all she knew to charm him. Were not her future prospects dependent on his (or on some man's) favour? Had she not been informed, and in most explicit terms, that her father had no mind to keep her always in his house, and that he expected her to betake herself without delay to her "natural duties?"

The chop-chopping of the hoe had ceased now, but only to be succeeded by the swish-swish of the broom sweeping away the withered leaves.

"I could sweep away withered leaves, or hoe out weeds; I could dust or cook, or wash, or—or anything that requires only health and strength. I might even be like Miss Bowles and teach, but it would have to be very young children,—I know so little, so little!"

She gave a shiver.

"Until to-day,—O mother, dear mother, I did not even know what it meant to be a girl!"

Like a pulse, the broom went beating on the gravel outside, and upon the window-panes struck the first drops of coming rain. A sound of wind among the trees heralded its approach, and presently it arrived; a gush of tears from the sorrow-laden heavens. Old William worked on as if he did not notice it, patiently bending his head to windward, without so much as looking up to see where the rain came from. Viola could bear the sight no longer. She rose, drew up the heavy ill-fitting window, and stood with the rain drifting in upon her face and hair.

"William," she said, "why do you go on working? You will get cold; you will get rheumatism; it is so bad for you. Why don't you go in?"

Old William paused for a moment, and raised himself slightly (only slightly) from his bent attitude, leaning on the handle of his broom.

"The rain don't do me no harm, Miss," he said, with a slight smile; "I'm used to it. Thomas says I'm to get this gravel done to night, and Mr. Sedley he wants to see it done; and I'm just a-doin' of it."

"Oh, what does it matter?" cried Viola. "Rheumatism must be so hard to bear."

Poor William gave a sadly knowing shake of the head.

"Ay, that it be, Miss," he said. "I has it so bad at times as I can't scarcely move—the rheumatis' is very bad, very bad indeed. My father, 'e 'ad it dreadful, 'e did; his joints was all gone stiff, and his fingers was all crumpled up like."

"Then it is madness in you to stay out in the rain," urged Viola.

But the old man had not arrived at that highly advanced stage of mental development when things immediate can be balanced against things future. As he had done for years, he went on working in the rain, and endured his rheumatism when it arrived with his usual patience. The act of mind and will necessary to alter his habitual conduct in deference to experience was beyond him.

All he would do was to put on his coat at Viola's urgent entreaty.

There was something in the dim, forlorn lot of this old man that had always filled Viola with sadness, but to-night she could have taken his hard old hand and kissed it and wept over it in an ecstasy of pity and fellow-feeling.

Had she spoken aloud the words that came welling up into her heart, she would have made old William open his eyes as he had never opened them in his life before.

"Let me come to you and comfort you; let me be a daughter to you; let me work for you and for myself; and then perhaps your lot might be brighter, and then I should not need to seek the favour of any man for the sake of house and home, or to avoid remaining here to be a burden to my father and to the world!"

Seldom does the civilized human being speak according to his impulse. He is too well drilled. Most lives are guided in their courses by far other than the strongest feelings of the actors. Often they are guided by the wishes of those with whom the lot has become associated; often mere force of habit will hold people in an old and painful groove for long pathetic years, merely because they consistently subordinate the great to the little, matters of life and death to some present, importunate, but perfectly trivial claim. Broken hearts, oftener than we think, are the handiwork of feeble heads. As Harry Lancaster had once said, with his usual extravagance, "Give me the making of the people's brains, and let who will make their hearts!"

When the rain and wind became so violent that old William could not continue his work, he yielded to the logic of events and took shelter in the potting-shed.

The rain was driving in great hissing sheets across the country; the windows streamed, and shook with angry clamour.

Throwing on a cloak and drawing the hood over her head, Viola went out into the storm. She could scarcely make way against it, the wind and rain beat so furiously against her. But she pressed on, seeming to find relief from the tempest of her own feeling in the tumult of the elements. One of the most painful features in her trouble was, that there was no one to be angry with; her whole nature rose in fury against what she felt to be the alternative indignities forced upon her, and yet her anger could not pour itself upon any indi-

vidual; she could not fling back the insult in his face and be free of it.

It clung to her defilingly, as some slimy sea-weed clings when it loses the sustaining of the water. The consciousness of it was fast saturating her whole being, so that the very texture of her soul was changed.

Struggling blindly on, harbouring a thousand wild thoughts, her attention was arrested by a low whine, and turning, she saw coming towards her the faithful Bill Dawkins,—a decrepid old dog now, how different from the sprightly poodle of bygone days, "who looked as if the speed of thought were in his limbs!" Quietly and with how sedate a mien Bill Dawkins dragged his slow limbs across the lawn, his ears adroop, his tail no longer quivering (as a compass-needle) with electrical intelligence!"

He and old William might have mingled their tears over their rheumatism, for poor Bill also suffered from this cruel malady; and had he been capable of mounting the hill of human thought and overlooking thence the plain of universal destiny, he might, in his pain and discouragement, have made an adaptation of the Japanese proverb and cried gloomily, "If you hate a dog, let him live."

Viola went to meet the limping creature with sorrowful heart.

Such was the end of life, and the beginning——? the rosy, riotous beginning? Of that was Viola herself a shining example!

"Are you coming with me in all this rain?" she asked, as she stooped to stroke the dog, who sat down at her feet and raised his expressive brown eyes to her face.

He looked up at her pleadingly, wistfully, as if he were trying with all his might to speak.

"What is it? what is it?" she asked, pitifully. "Are you in pain? Are you miserable and lonely? Does no one care whether you are alive or dead? But, indeed, *one* person does care, and *one* heart sickens at these dumb tragedies that nobody heeds."

She bent down and took him tenderly in her arms—great creature as he was—and carried him into one of the many tumble-down old outhouses where the apples and pears, and the watering-machines and rollers, and a thousand and one odds and ends were stowed away.

The place had a fresh earthy scent, redolent to Viola of subtle memories of childhood, bringing back in sweet overpowering rushes feelings of the bygone days. How many a joyous hour had she and Geoffrey and Bill Dawkins spent in this old shed, potting cuttings, trying experiments (and such experiments!) with the watering machine—growing instantaneous mustard and cress, eating apples, and indulging in a thousand other pastimes, in all of which the poodle had more or less taken part! There was some straw and a piece of old

sacking on the floor, and upon this Viola laid him, covering him up as much as he would allow her, for he was shivering all over and looked most wretched. He seemed very weak, but he wagged his tail now and again, and he had a heart-breaking way of offering to shake hands at intervals in a feeble, affectionate fashion. There was something in his demeanour besides gratitude; he seemed to have divined that his mistress was in trouble, and was doing his best to comfort her.

Love is one of those lawless emotions that cares nothing for what is "natural" or expected; and Viola's love for this faithful creature did not pause to moderate itself on the reflection that to expend so much time and devotion upon an animal argued an ill-regulated mind.

The good poodle had a personality as distinct as that of any human being, and a more lovable one human being never had!

Viola was down on her knees beside him, caressing, soothing, speaking loving words, with a desperate feeling in her heart all the time that the poor creature was dying.

"It would not be kind to keep you if I could," she said tenderly; "but oh! how sad, how sad I shall be without you!"

Almost as if he understood, the dog half turned and laid his paw, in the old pleading, caressing way, upon her arm. The next moment he sank down again panting; his body gave a spasmodic twitch, and then lay very still. With a low cry, Viola flung her arms round him passionately, and kissed his shaggy head again and again.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my dear one; my noblest, kindest, faithfulest friend! Good-bye for ever! and oh that I could tell how I have loved you!"

The dim, beautiful eyes opened slowly; the dying creature looked up with an almost human expression of love and gratitude; then he feebly licked Viola's hand for the last time, and died.

Viola, lying down beside him on the rough straw, sobbed her heart out.

CHAPTER X.

ADRIENNE.

Not many days after Bill Dawkins' death Harry Lancaster arrived in England. He went first to see his mother and his sister, who lived at Upton, in a tiny house belonging to Lord Clevedon, about a mile from the home where they had passed their prosperous days before Mr Lancaster's death. Mrs. Dixie, who had married a second time, and lost her second

husband almost immediately after her marriage, had a bland expansiveness about her manner which referred directly to her former glories, just as her old lace and miniatures and sundry valuable pieces of plate were eloquent relics of that past which threw so much effulgence upon her and her only daughter, Adrienne. Adrienne, however, was a cultivated, keen-witted young woman, dainty in ideas as in her person, and she made her allusions to the past with delicacy, and indeed very seldom made them at all. She did not follow her mother's example of wearing at her throat a gigantic ancestor, with pink cheeks and a light blue coat. Her own son used to say of Mrs. Dixie that she was like a gorgeous sunset after a hot midsummer day; the sun and its glories had gone down, but the glow still remained.

"Well, mother, still the lady of the Castle," he said. "I declare you wear your vanished crown more royally than ever you did its antitype. It makes me feel like an involuntary Prince of Wales merely to look at you!"

As Mrs. Dixie liked to think that she possessed the "grand air," and as her sense of the ridiculous had its own very exclusive walks in life, she was able to draw up her portly figure with a peculiar wave of the spine presumably characteristic of royalty, while she smiled graciously down her not perfectly straight nose, remarking, with a sway of the head like that of a poplar in the wind—

"My dear boy, I trust that I am as well able to fill a humble position with dignity as one more elevated. It is not wealth and prosperity that make the lady" (this with an air that beggars description).

Harry gave a queer smile, expressive of so many things that it would be hard to name them all without making an exhaustive analysis of his character, and that would be a hard task indeed. A few characteristics may, however, be given. He was contemplative, critical, with an abiding enjoyment of the comedy of life, and a continual consciousness of the great deeps that lay beneath the feet of the players.

It was this eternal mystery that gave such a wild zest to the never-ending game, such a ring to the laughter echoing dimly through those dark gulfs,—such wings to the jest and the fancy!

Harry was regarded at the Cottage as a joke personified; his mother used to treasure up his sayings, and repeat them afterwards, minus the point, to her friends, with great pride and pomp.

It was almost impossible to annoy Harry Lancaster, although he was capable on rare occasions of furious anger. The little mortifications of life that irritate most people served only as a fresh subject for some ridiculous pseudo-philosophy, on his part; so that he was a very pleasant inmate of any house, for he had the alchemist's gift of turning

base little troubles into golden opportunities for laughter. His sister Adrienne, who bore the whole burden of the household and family affairs upon her wise shoulders, used to declare that Harry's presence acted upon her health as a change to the seaside, and that he was the only infallible cure she knew of for headaches.

For the rest, he was more or less of a mystery; nobody seemed to know what he thought in his serious moments, or if he had any serious moments at all.

His manner was genial, even gaily affectionate; but the light, nonsensical vein always ran through everything he said, and cropping out unexpectedly in his gravest moments, and constituted a wall of reserve far more impenetrable than mere silence.

Brother and sister had been confidants as boy and girl in the early days at "the Palace" before the "Sunset," as Harry called respectively their old home and their change of fortune. Together, in the dusk, they used to talk of the mysteries of life and death, of immortality, of free-will, of good and evil, of the formation of character, and the service of God. Adrienne used often to wonder what her brother thought of these things now after his man's experience of life. She herself had adopted a more or less conventional view of things in an unconventional way. She was too clever to be a mere passive echo; she thought for herself within limits, and had now become a refined, elevated, intelligent expositor of current views.

She responded to ideas of great moral elevation, while her admiration also ran towards a certain French *finesse* and sparkle, all of which qualities were shadowed forth in the daintiness of her dress and the delicate *nuances* of her manner.

The swift pliancy of fancy which was one of Harry's most attractive peculiarities Adrienne shared with him, but there was a singular difference in the manifestation of the same quality in the two characters.

In Harry it suggested a certain largeness and freedom of nature; while in the sister it expressed fineness, brilliancy, cultivation; but so far from giving the idea of liberty, it implied that of indefinable limitation. It suggested a nature close-set, concise, with crisp outlines, guiltless of expansive wandering into the untried. Adrienne Lancaster never wandered carelessly into any region. She must be quite sure first if she approved of a region before she entered it. There was no reckless touch in her disposition, and in no circumstances could one imagine the quality developing in her. In her brother it was very marked, though, so far, it had shown itself in a mere riot of fancy and humour. So alien to Adrienne's consciousness was the attribute that she even failed to notice it in Harry, closely as she studied him.

It may be supposed that a good-looking young officer, of

genial temperament and pleasant manners, became very dear to the village of Upton; and "society" (consisting of the vicar's family, the doctor's family, Mr. and Mrs. Pellett, and one or two others) claimed him passionately for its own. The vicar's family was inordinately large, and the prevailing impression left upon the mind after an introduction was "eternally feminine," a circumstance which the village thought most unfortunate, for how were all those girls to get married?

How indeed? for though Harry might do his duty as England expected of him, he could not marry the whole contingent of amiable sisters. England would have shown herself ungrateful if he had!

And then, was he in a position to marry even *one* of them? The village feared not, much as it desired to see a break made in the firm ranks of the vicar's charming family. Dick Evans, the eldest son, a pleasant, clever young fellow, a former friend at Oxford, became Harry's frequent companion, and the latter also showed a predilection for Dorothy, the youngest sister, still little more than a child, a fresh, robust, joyous creature, with bright cheeks and untidy auburn hair, and an incurable love for climbing trees and other unladylike pastimes, in which Harry wickedly encouraged her. She was an amusing proof of the inadequateness of common-sense for achieving reasonable views of life; for Dorothy had, as Harry said, enough of this quality to supply the deficiency of the House of Commons (he could not say more), yet her ideas on men, women, and things were the most laughter-moving that it had ever been his good fortune to meet with.

She was one of those rare beings who are predestined to be happy, to whom "whatever is, is right," in the social world as in nature.

Upton was twelve miles from the Manor House, so that Viola, unfortunately, could not enjoy the enormous advantage of knowing intimately a girl so different from herself as Dorothy Evans. Once or twice Viola had been to Upton, and remembered it as a little cluster of thatched cottages with pretty gardens, and one or two old-fashioned houses, which looked so calm and beautiful that it seemed as if the current of life must have been arrested, as if some satisfied Faust had at last said to the passing moment, "Stay; thou art so fair," and the command had been obeyed by Destiny.

It was on a balmy summer's day that Viola first saw the place, and the picture remained very vividly in her memory. She wondered afterwards if some premonition of what was to come had made her regard it with special interest.

Do we not all feel driven at times to believe that certain places, just as certain people, are fateful for us?—that there is some subtle link between them and us, which we cannot break if we would?

Beautiful as it was, Viola had a faint, unaccountable dislike

to the village; it seemed like a lovely grave, it was so "hideously serene."

"No swellings tell that winds may be
Upon some far off, happier sea,"

though the sea lay so near, out of sight beyond the undulating downs.

The second time that Viola saw this place was on the rare occasion of a two days' visit to her aunt at Clevedon. By this time the "demon boy," as Harry called the heir, had grown up and gone to Oxford, while the girl, who was some years older than Viola, had married and lived in town,—"prosperous and miserable," according to the same authority.

For a wonder, "Aunt Augusta" had just now only one friend staying with her, a supernaturally stylish lady called Mrs. Russell Courtenay, who had so much "manner" that she thoroughly alarmed Viola, that young woman little guessing that this small-waisted being, with her vast assortment of turns and twists and wriggles, her bewildering pranks and gestures, was in reality a prey to shyness, greater if possible than Viola's own.

Lady Clevedon drove her two guests over to call on Mrs, Dixie and Adrienne.

"I hope that Harry will be in, but I don't think it's likely," she said; "he is the most erratic person I know; and I fear he is either walking poor old Mr. Pellett off his legs, undoing Dorothy Evans's careful education, or talking nonsense to that ridiculous creature who poses as a philosopher, Caleb—Caleb what's-his-name?"

"Williams," suggested Mrs. Russell Courtenay, who knew something about literature, but whose memory her unfortunate shyness sometimes confused.

Lady Clevedon treated her suggestion with friendly derision, and Mrs. Courtenay suffered as keenly as if she had had on a shabby dress, or there had been a want of style about her bonnet. Effect was the idol of her soul. She posed, even to herself.

The neat little cottage, covered with wistaria in full bloom, looked radiant this afternoon.

Adrienne, in a dainty but serviceable holland apron, was gardening when the visitors drove up.

Poor Viola! this young woman, too, had "manner," though it was less artificial than Mrs. Courtenay's, and therefore less alarming.

"O Augusta! I am so glad! And Mrs. Courtenay too," she cried, running to the gate to let them in. "This is heaping coals of fire upon my head; for I ought to have called on you long ago. You must forgive a busy person who has cares of state upon her shoulders. Do come in; my mother will be delighted."

"Adrienne," said Lady Clevedon, "this is my niece, Viola,

whose acquaintance you ought to have made long ago. However, better late than never !"

"Better, indeed," said Miss Lancaster, with a pleasant smile. "I scarcely feel like a stranger to you, Miss Sedley, for your name has so long been familiar to me. Alas ! those horrid twelve miles between Upton and your place have much to answer for, have they not ?"

"A punishment for flying in the face of Providence and living in the country," observed Mrs. Courtenay, with a stylish undulation.

This proposition led to a gay dispute, during which Adrienne conducted the visitors indoors, where they found Mrs. Dixie indulging in a regal nap, from which, however, she woke with creditable rapidity, and received her guests in what Harry called her best "sunset" manner.

He came in in the midst of the interview, looking very warm and travel-stained. Adrienne said that a clever geologist might tell exactly where he had been walking by a study of his garments.

"I have been exploring the cliffs with Dick Evans," said Harry.

"Would he not come back with you to tea as usual ?" asked Mrs. Dixie.

Harry smiled.

"No; he preferred returning to the Rectory by the back entrance, 'for reasons' (as Mr. Carlyle says) 'which it may be interesting not to state.'"

Being pressed for explanations, Harry said that Dick had unhappily rolled down a soft chalky incline, and that the general tone of his colouring had been so materially altered thereby as to make him feel a delicacy about appearing in refined society.

Dorothy had met him in the back avenue, and had been driven for the expression of her feelings to roll over and over on the lawn, regardless of the fact that her mother had never encouraged her in such emotional excesses.

After a burst of laughter, which the mere name of Dorothy was usually enough to call forth at the Cottage, Lady Clevedon laid her hand on Viola's arm.

"Now, Harry," she said, "tell me if you know who this is ?"

Harry roused himself, uncrossed his arms, and looked inquiringly from his cousin to Viola. She blushed and smiled a little, and as she smiled a faint memory like a whiff of scent came to him, and faded away again. He struggled to recall it in vain, and then a thought seemed to strike him.

"Not Miss Sedley ?"

He rose with a pleased smile, and went over to her in the corner.

"I am very glad I came in this afternoon," he said, "for I am most interested to renew an old acquaintance. I have

often laughed over that day at the ruin when you were so angry with Philip Dendraith; do you remember? It was splendid the way you fought him. Do you know, I can still see a likeness to what you were at that time, though you don't look quite so like fighting as you did then," he added, with a smile.

"Oh, I hope I am not so bad-tempered now," she said, blushing. "I was always very angry if any one behaved unkindly to my dog, and you know Mr. Dendraith *was* unkind to him."

There was a faint, very faint gleam in her eyes even now as she said it.

"The old spirit has not died out," Harry said to himself, with a smile; "she thinks it is dead and gone, but some day, when least expected, it will break out again, and in the woman it will mean a good deal more than in the child."

"I suppose you sometimes see your old enemy, now that he is at Upton Court?" Harry continued. "Being a rider, he could get over to you without much trouble across country."

Harry wondered why Viola blushed again so deeply and so painfully. He was not foolish enough to jump to the usual conclusion in such cases, but he did nevertheless think it possible that the girl had followed in the footsteps of so many of her sex and lost her heart to Philip Dendraith. In making up their old quarrel, it would be so easy for them to overdo it. A mere hair's-breadth would take them across the line of mere reconciliation, and Philip was "fearfully and wonderfully" handsome.

Harry felt regretful, almost indignant, at the notion of this possibility. From a worldly point of view Philip would, of course, be a brilliant match; but he was cold, self-indulgent, cynical, with the same unbending will that he had shown when a mere youth, further strengthened by the easy conquests which it had since brought him. Besides, Harry knew that Philip had lived a life of low and selfish pleasure, only more prudently than others, so that, while many of his companions had gone to wrack and ruin altogether, he was still prospering.

But this cold prudence which had saved him was no ornament to his character in his critic's eyes. Viola married to such a man was almost unthinkable, and yet (Harry said to himself) Society is every day bringing about these inconceivable things. The woman marries and gives no sign; no one knows how the unthinkable is worked out in daily detail.

He studied the face beside him with great interest. It attracted him far more than many a girlish face which he would have called pretty and have forgotten again the next minute. Was Viola pretty? He did not quite know. The appeal that her face made was new in kind, and had to be considered. She had a very dark skin, and her colouring when she blushed was rich and fine. The face gained upon

one rapidly; it was a haunting face—yes; certainly it was pretty;—very pretty. What had come to him? It was *beautiful!*

Harry drew his hand across his eyes, as if he thought they had deceived him, but no; in a little over twenty minutes, during which the conversation had been upon quite trivial topics, these changes of impression had taken place in him, and the face which he had hesitated at first to call pretty had acquired in his eyes an unaccountable charm.

"I suppose not very much has happened at your home since I left," he said, musingly. "It is just the same here. I go away, for years; a thousand things happen to me; I see hundreds of new faces, new scenes: I have many experiences great and small,—and I come back to find precisely the same life going on as when I went away. I ask what has happened, and I am told that old Sally is dead, and so-and-so is married; that a new window has been put in the church, and that Lady Clevedon has built a wing to the schoolhouse! But I suppose these are very important matters after all," Harry added, remembering that such interests were all that Viola possessed.

"I know very little of what goes on outside my own home," she said. "I visit the people in our village with my mother sometimes, but I don't like it; I never know what to say, and I feel intrusive and uncomfortable. The people always talk to mother about their Heavenly Father"—Viola hesitated a little, for a sudden suppressed smile had flitted across Harry's face, a smile not to be hidden by the moustache which Adrienne used to say endeared him to his fellow-creatures so inexpressibly.

He looked very grave the next minute, and expressed great interest in Viola's account of her district-visiting.

"My mother gives the cottagers soup and blankets, and she reads the Bible to them," Viola continued, drawn out of her reserve by something simple and genial in Harry's manner which no one had yet been able to resist. His dramatic power of entering into the feelings of others placed him in relation with a vast number of types of human nature and gave him a power over them, different from, but perhaps not less remarkable than, Philip Dendraith's. It was irksome to him to have to retire into the limits of his own personality; he preferred to explore that of others. The simple, firm outlines of Viola's character, and its intense concentration, formed an attractive study to a mind so entirely different in type.

"And do you think the villagers like to have the Bible read to them?" he inquired gravely.

"Of course," said Lady Clevedon, overhearing the question; "there has been established an intimate relation, of the nature of cause and effect, between the Bible and port wine, which is very favourable to the propagation of the Gospel among the labouring classes in this country."

"Lady Clevedon, you are really very naughty!" cried Mrs. Russell Courtenay, with one of her favourite wriggles. "This fresh innocent mind will lose its bloom if her young ears are assailed with such sentiments."

"Oh! she had much better listen to me than to Harry," said Lady Clevedon; "I think he really must be 'The Ambassador Extraordinary' (you know the book?)"—(Mrs. Courtenay murmured, "Oh, yes.")—"He has all the plausible exterior of that Satanic emissary, and I can vouch for the Satanic character of his sentiments. I thought India would have cooled him down"—

("Not a usual result of the climate," murmured Adrienne.)

—"but instead of that he is worse than ever!"

"*You* seem to have been able to draw him out," said Mrs. Dixie, a little annoyed; "he never tells *us* what he thinks. I suppose he doesn't consider us capable of understanding him."

"Oh! nonsense," cried Lady Clevedon; "he wisely shrinks from your criticism."

"This is crushing," said Harry, lazily. "I wonder why it is that a peaceable fellow like me should always be attacked. 'Can you fight?' 'No.' 'Then come on.' That is how the world treats me! And yet I smile forgivingly upon it.

'She was more than usual, calm;
She did not give a single damn,"

he murmured, softly quoting.

"Mr. Lancaster, Mr. Lancaster!" cried Mrs. Courtenay, "*respectez l'innocence.*"

"I beg your pardon?" said Harry, bending towards her in courteous inquiry.

"*Respectez l'innocence,*" repeated the lady, with increased emphasis.

"Might I ask you to repeat the phrase once more?"

Mrs. Courtenay lost her presence of mind.

"I said you should respect innocence, Mr. Lancaster."

"Oh! I always do," said Harry, with an air a little shocked that the lady should have thought it necessary to recommend so obvious a duty. "Lives there a soul so black"——

"Now Harry, no more of your nonsense," said his cousin; "Mrs. Courtenay isn't used to you yet, and she must not be badgered. When are you coming over to see us? And you, Adrienne? Now don't say you are busy; people needn't be busy unless they like. Business is the mark of a feeble mind. Come over soon, while Viola is with me; you must get to know each other. I am going to make her stay longer.—No, my dear, you needn't talk about your mamma,—your mamma will have to do as she is told. I tell her it's exceedingly bad for a girl to be shut up and never see a living creature. Harry, I give you *carte blanche* to badger *her* as much as you like; it is just what she wants. Viola, then, will stay with me for the next week—(be quiet, my dear!)—and you will all

come over and have some tennis, or anything you like—let me see—the Featherstones are coming to-morrow—say on Wednesday, then. So that's settled. No, Adrienne, excuse me, you have nothing whatever to do. Australian letters? Nonsense. Haven't got a dress? Borrow one of your mother's."

"Or," suggested Harry, "adopt the idea of the poor woman whom a narrow-minded world condemned to a madhouse because she insisted on wearing costumes made out of advertisement sheets of the *Times* on week-days, and brown-paper on Sundays."

"If they were well made, I am sure they would look very stylish," said Mrs. Courtenay.

"But, alas! they would have a fault quite fatal in this age of the worship of the Golden Calf," said Adrienne in a tone which only to Harry betrayed its latent bitterness. "No one could stand before them and exclaim—like Mrs. Carlyle's maid before the pictures at the National Gallery—"How expensive!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

When brother and sister arrived at Clevedon Castle on the Wednesday as arranged, Harry felt a pang of disappointment at seeing only his cousins and Mrs. Russell Courtenay on the tennis ground.

"Your niece gone after all?" he asked.

"Oh, no; she is coming presently; she is so absurdly shy that I could not persuade her to be here when you arrived. Most ridiculous; she is going to slip in presently when you are all engaged in tennis, and thus escape observation. I expect Dick Evans and Dorothy this afternoon, and perhaps Philip Dendraith. *Entre nous*, I fancy he rather admires Viola, so I thought they might as well have an opportunity of meeting.".

"Augusta," cried Adrienne, "*you* condescend to the *rôle* of matchmaker!"

"Nonsense," she replied; "but Viola really needs to be drawn out of herself. She couldn't flirt if she tried, so I am not afraid of starting a silly affair of that sort. I simply want to give her a little experience and *savoir faire*, and a polished man of the world like Philip Dendraith is exactly the instrument for my purpose. He is certain to teach her something at any rate, but what that will be is another matter. Do you think his admiration is at all serious?"

Lady Clevedon raised her eyebrows. "How can one possi-

bly tell that in a man like Philip? What do you think of my niece, by the way?" Harry hesitated. "Just so," said Lady Clevedon, "but she will improve; her bringing-up has been so much against her. Her devoted mother has been the ruin of all that family. Poor Marion! what a life she has had of it; more than half her own fault, too. She is really never content unless she is in trouble; I assure you it's a fact. Now it's money matters, now it's household tragedies, now it's her husband's health, now it's those graceless sons. At present Viola is the source of woe."

"Why, what does she do to cause anxiety?"

"My dear Harry, she lives; that is enough for Marion. Of course, the results of the girl's training are beginning to show, and her mother is quite surprised. Really, the foolishness of women is something quite amazing. Talk about female suffrage! I'd rather enfranchise the idiot asylums; yes, and I would go so far as to add the clerical profession!"

"Does Mrs. Sedley regret her daughter's shyness?" inquired Adrienne.

"She sees that she is too sensitive, as she calls it. The girl shows a singular preference for her own society, which I should say was anything but entertaining. Her mother declares that she *thinks!*" Lady Clevedon laughed. "The motherly ingenuity of the idea quite charms me. When I am not angry with Marion she amuses me mightily. Poor woman, she came to me almost in tears the other day, because she said Viola had got into her head that she wanted to earn her own living. It was really too funny; I laughed till I could laugh no longer, and poor Marion looked on without a smile, and when I had finished she repeated the thing over again, in exactly the same tone of extreme concern; and if Arabella hadn't come meandering in at the moment I don't know what would have happened to me."

"Why does Viola want to earn her own living?" asked Adrienne.

Lady Clevedon shrugged her shoulders. "My dear, why does she blush if you speak to her suddenly? Why does she allow her mother to dress her in pale lavender sprigs on a white ground?"

"She ought to make a stand for brown paper," said Harry.

"Infinitely preferable!" cried his cousin.

"Well, Dorothy, so you have managed to come: that's right. How bonny you look! Whom are you going to annihilate this time with that vindictive-looking racket of yours?"

A tennis-set having been arranged between Dorothy and Harry Lancaster on the one side, and Dick Evans and Adrienne on the other, the players took their places, Dorothy panting for the fray. Dick was a stoutly-made reddish-haired young fellow, with a decided, intelligent manner, and a pleasant smile. His capacious head with square brow indicated the direction of his powers. He had that sublimated

common-sense, that power of drawing accurate deductions from closely observed data, which when rightly cultivated marks, according to Professor Huxley, the scientific intellect. His tennis-playing was eminently scientific, "screws" being very plentiful in his "service," as was evident from Dorothy's frequent exclamations of rage.

During the game Philip Dendraith arrived in tennis costume and joined Lady Clevedon and Mrs. Courtenay in the shade of a beech-tree where they were sitting, watching the battle.

He was even handsomer now than he was in the old days when Viola first knew him. His figure had filled out, giving him a more manly look; his manner, always polished, was now as perfect as any manner can be that does not take its rise in warmth of heart and wealth of sympathy. He was a man whom Sir Roger de Coverley would have censured very severely, for "preferring the reputation of wit and sense to that of honesty and virtue." He would have counted among those who, according to that moralist, alone deserved hanging; those men who are continually "offending against such quick admonitions as their own souls give them, and blunting the fine edge of their minds, in such a manner that they are no more shocked at vice and folly than men of slower capacities."

Philip Dendraith had certainly never been shocked at vice in his life, and at folly he laughed. He could listen to a tale of cruelty without the slightest thrill of anger against the perpetrator of the deed, or of pity for the sufferer. It never seemed to strike him to imagine himself in the place of the victim. He took his stand among the powerful, and had no fellow-feeling for the weak—whether weak by circumstance or by nature.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your picturesque appearance," he said, as he raised his cap to the two ladies; "I feel as if I were about to take an unworthy part in a 'Watteau.' The blue green foliage behind you makes a most characteristic background."

"Oh, it's only the *background*," cried Mrs. Courtenay, gaily aggrieved; "and we were flattering ourselves that *we* formed the attractive part of the picture."

"Nor were you deceived," said Philip; "there could be no doubt of *your* efficiency, but the background might have failed."

"Mr. Dendraith always manages to wriggle out of a difficulty somehow," said Mrs. Courtenay.

"He more generally walks out of it, I think, Arabella. Well played! Adrienne, you must bestir yourself. Did you ever see anything like the energy of that child; her whole soul is in the game."

Dorothy certainly was worth watching as she sprang now

to this side, now to that, her auburn hair flying behind her, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling.

"I wish I could see Viola losing herself like that in a game," said Lady Clevedon.

"I thought your niece was to be here to-day," said Philip.

"So she is; I don't know why she doesn't come out."

"I will go and lead the lamb to the slaughter," said Mrs. Courtenay.

"Only once have I had the pleasure of seeing Miss Sedley since I met her at Upton," Philip observed, when Arabella was gone. "I have called three or four times at the Manor House, but till Saturday last she never appeared, and when she did I could only get a few monosyllables out of her. She has nevertheless the makings of a very charming woman; there is a peculiar quality about her, not easy to describe, a particular kind of coldness that suggests hidden fire, and women of that type are always attractive. I want to make way in your niece's good graces; she quite takes my fancy, upon my word." Something in Lady Clevedon's movement of the eyebrows made Philip hasten to add, "Not that there is anything astonishing in that. I have no doubt Miss Sedley is universally admired."

A half-satirical bow was followed by an amused exclamation, for crossing the lawn came arm in arm, as if on the closest terms of confidence, Viola and Arabella, Viola walking as straight as a monument, suffering the sprightly Arabella to wreath herself about her—obviously because she was unable to prevent it.

"You have chosen your co-visitors with infinite discretion," observed Philip, with a thin smile.

"Yes, they are a delicious pair, and would you believe it, one is almost as shy as the other. Well, Viola, my dear, weazled out of your hole at last; you have lost the best half of the afternoon over your headache."

"Have you a headache?" said Philip, in a tone full of concern. "I think it is very good of you to give us a glimpse of you at all in that case." He spoke in the low, flattering tones that most women found so fascinating, and of which none could fail to feel the charm. Viola looked up; it sounded so exactly as if he were sincere. His dark eyes, fixed admiringly upon her, offered no further clue to his meaning. If ever eyes were given to conceal the thoughts, Philip Dendraith's were bestowed on him for that purpose."

"Mr. Lancaster, what *are* you about?" Dorothy's voice rang out in dismay; "that ball would have been out a long way, if you hadn't taken it."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Harry; "I'm afraid it has lost us the set."

And it had. The players came up from the tennis ground (Dorothy disconsolate), and joined the Watteau group, under the beech-tree.

"You seemed rather to lose your head at the last," Philip said, addressing Harry, with a keen look in those inscrutable eyes of his.

"Impossible," returned Harry, flinging himself on a scarlet rug at Mrs. Courtenay's feet; "I haven't such a thing to lose."

"Our dear Mr. Lancaster, if we are to take his word for it, has run all to heart," said Arabella.

"He had better look out and not lose it then," said Dick, "or he'll have nothing left to steer by."

"Except the advice of my friends, and that is always to be had. A man *minus* both head and heart is such a rarity, that he might possibly also distinguish himself from the common herd by consenting to take it," said Philip.

"Not he," threw in Harry; "it requires the full power of both those organs to persuade a man that the rest of the world are not all bigger fools than himself."

"A strange use to put one's head and heart to," observed Dick: "self-dethronement."

"The highest human achievement, I assure you," said Harry, whether from conviction or, as Philip declared, out of pure "cussedness," no one could determine.

Adrienne looked at him inquiringly in vain.

"That is the ever-beautiful doctrine of Renunciation in a new form," she said seriously.

"Yes," Mrs. Courtenay chimed in, "always sacrificing ourselves for others, don't you know? Of course that is so Christian—isn't it?"

"Well, no, I don't think it *is*," said Harry; "and I think, moreover, that it is a method of procedure extremely inconvenient for 'others.' If people, instead of indulging in useless moral austerities, would be so kind as to acquaint themselves, for instance, with the simplest laws of human well-being, they would be doing more good to the ill-used bodies and souls of their fellow-men than if they had themselves flattened out by steam-rollers, or sent through the most painful of sausage-making machines. The human being becomes comparatively valueless as mince-meat."

"O Mr. Lancaster!" cried Arabella, "but I do so think we ought to try to be unselfish, don't you know?"

"I think we ought first to try not to be blockheads," said Harry. "I know it is a hard saying—far harder than 'Renounce' or 'Surrender;' but it is the message of the age for all firm and upright souls, better than all the self-effacing doctrines which condemn the individual (and therefore the race) to the ridiculous position of the egg-and-breadcrumbed whiting, whose energies, arguing in a circle, are employed in industriously devouring his own tail."

"Listen to him!" cried Arabella.

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," murmured

Philip; at which there was a chuckle from Harry and a laugh from the others, Viola and Dorothy excepted.

"Now, Mr. Dendraith," cried Arabella, "do tell us what you think about it. I confess I cling to the old idea in this matter, and prefer the humble office of the whiting (though it may be rather foolish) to the enlightened selfishness that Mr. Lancaster so ably advocates."

Philip shrugged his shoulders. "I fear I shall shock the company when I say that my idea of life is to make oneself as comfortable as possible, and only to injure one's neighbours as much as is necessary to secure that important end. I may add, that I differ from most people in this matter merely in regard to frankness."

"Instead of some robust, well-founded principle which might hold its own against this Philosophy of selfishness, we have nothing but a sickly pseudo-Christian morality addressed to the little personal righteousness or desire for righteousness of each candidate for Heaven, so that in the midst of a predatory society we possess little or nothing to counteract the universal scramble but a few of these absurd and heroic whitings painfully eating their own tails. As well try to cure the world's evils with a set of dancing dervishes!"

"I say, Dorothy, what do you think of all this heresy?" asked her brother.

"Oh, Mr. Lancaster is always saying some extraordinary thing that nobody else ever dreamt of; it doesn't matter," returned Dorothy cheerfully, at which there was a shout of laughter at Harry's expense.

"I fear it *does* matter, though," cried Adrienne, seeing Viola's look of horror and dismay. "You are working against the noblest spirit of the age; you pluck the highest motive out of the hearts of our most devoted men and women."

"I deny it," said Harry; "I say to them only, in the name of humanity, don't mistake mere self-mutilation for the service of man. The chain is only as strong as its weakest link. You are a link in the chain of the general life, and your business is to see that it is a good one. In the name of Heaven, *not* the whiting-trick!"

Adrienne shook her head. "A dangerous doctrine," she said, "too flattering to our innate self-love."

"That is a personal view of the matter," returned Harry, "and shows the moral flaw in the doctrine of pure altruism. You care, after all, chiefly for your virtue and its future prospects. A personal righteousness is to my mind a mere toy; a doll stuffed with sawdust, which one hugs to one's mistaken heart. We shall have to throw away our dolls, for they are all fetiches; yes, even our new, ingenious, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed doll with the sweet expression, who says, 'Papa, Mamma, no jam for me, jam for Tommy.'"

The idea of this ingenious creature amused Dorothy, and her comments on the subject shortly reduced the assembly to a frame of mind entirely unsuited to discussing ethical questions. Their thoughts returned to tennis, and several sets were played, in one of which Viola was induced to take part. After it was over, Philip suggested a stroll round the gardens, and Viola, too shy to dissent, made a sign of acquiescence. Every detail of that miserable interview with her father returned to her memory, as Philip with flattering deference led her round the beautiful old gardens, where the sun was drawing the rich scent from the roses, and filling the air with a glow that only can be compared among things human to that happiness which is said to visit none but the loftiest souls, and these it only brushes lightly with its wings, as if an angel were passing on his heavenward way.

"I ought to smile and flatter and try to charm this man," the girl was saying bitterly to herself; "that is my business as a woman: otherwise—" But Viola did not smile, except undesignedly sometimes when Philip's talk entertained her against her will. She maintained a politely cold demeanour, appearing a little to lose her shyness in the yet stronger feeling of womanly pride. The old childish dislike to Philip had of course lost its venom, but those memories were not without their influence on her present feelings, and these were further complicated by the knowledge of the momentary murderous impulse which had so nearly caused her enemy's death. The remorse and the desire of atonement were still potent. Philip, who, according to his habit, led the way and decided details, discovered a sequestered spot among the windings of the shrubberies, where there was a seat, and here he suggested that they should rest and meditate.

The spot seemed consecrated to the Goddess of Indolence, so warm and still was the air, so sleepy were the sounds of humming bees and droning insects.

Viola sat down, while Philip, finding his position on the seat too cramped, asked permission to lie upon the grass at her feet.

"Now this is what I call true philosophy," he said lazily; "the man who knows not how to be idle, does not know how to live."

"Most people know how to be idle, I think," said Viola.

"Pardon me, but I think there are very few," said Philip. "Italians understand the art, but the Teutonic races are burnt up with a fire of action that makes our country the most glorious and the most uncomfortable in Europe."

"Only just now Mr. Lancaster was saying that ours is the only language that has the word 'comfort' in it at all," said Viola, falling into the trap that her companion had set for her.

"Oh yes, we have comfort in our chairs and tables, perhaps, and that is no small matter; still it is not everything.

We eat well and sleep softly, but how dearly we pay for these things! Is there not something a little incongruous in the idea of a man toiling hard all his life to enable him at last to buy an easy-chair?"

Viola smiled, and Philip smiled too, but after quite a different fashion. He saw clearly enough that the girl had no intention of paying the usual tribute to his fascinations, but the omission only attracted him. He was tired of girls who could be had for the asking, and less.

It would be a delightful task to kindle those beautiful eyes with an unknown emotion, and to make the proud heart beat more quickly in its owner's despite. That would be a victory worth having; a genuine tribute to his power and skill.

Philip had scarcely believed in the existence of a girl able to resist the temptation of wealth and position, but he was half disposed to forswear his customary cynicism in Viola's favour. He was too keen to be uncompromisingly cynical. He also saw that, in order to arouse in her the feelings he desired, her ideas must first be led to impersonal subjects, so that her present hostility might be lulled. His studies of human nature made him calculate that hostility was a better ground to work upon than indifference. Hostility implied feeling, and feeling was always fruitful of event.

Again, women's hostility was of a passionate unfounded order, that might just as reasonably be amity; therefore it was capable of transformation.

Philip did not think all this out in so many words: the ideas floated through his mind as idly as the flies drifted through the atmosphere; while all the time he went on talking, waiting at intervals for Viola's answers, and treating them, when they half-unwillingly came, with a deference that was very flattering in a man of his experience and acknowledged power.

Her expression had begun to change; already she was forgetting herself in what her companion was saying, and Philip now found a new subtle charm in the face: so much so that he began to wonder if he should be able to keep up the judicial spirit of the experiment while he sought to summon expressions yet more beautiful to the deep eyes and the proud lips.

The doubt did not all detract from the interest of the pastime. After a while he ventured to leave the impersonal topics which had served their purpose so well, and to broach the subject of the past and its memories.

"How you used to hate me in those days!" he said, with a sigh; "it was really rather strange, I think, for I used to be quite fond of you; and one imagines that love begets love, does one not?"

"I have never forgiven myself for what I did," said Viola, "and the memory of it haunts me to this day."

"My dear Miss Sedley, you distress me," cried Philip, rais-

ing himself on one elbow; "I had no idea you took the matter so seriously."

"I have reason to," she said, shaking her head.

"But why should you reproach yourself? Here I am safe and sound, and uncommonly jolly (especially at this moment), into the bargain."

"No thanks to me," said Viola.

"Yes, for present mercies thanks to you particularly," he returned.

She looked at him with a puzzled air. Could he really care, however slightly, for her society,—he who had travelled all over the world, and mingled with the brilliant and beautiful of all countries?

She gave a faint movement of the shoulders, as if she abandoned the problem in despair. But the conversation, the mere presence of an intelligent human being to one in her monotonous circumstances, was sufficiently intoxicating without the aid of flattery.

"If you still reproach yourself for that old offence," Philip continued, "I think it is high time that it should be expunged from the list of your sins. I forgive you; there's my hand on it; and now you have no excuse for thinking of it any more."

"Oh, but you don't know, you don't know," cried Viola, drawing away the hand he had endeavoured to take. "I can't let you forgive me in ignorance of my real offence."

Philip looked up.

"Do tell me what you mean; I thought I did know your offence, such as it was; I suppose you didn't attempt to put prussic acid in my medicine, or resort to perfume poisons after the manner of the Borgias? If you did, upon my honour, you would be an entrancingly interesting person!"

"Interesting because I was criminal!" cried Viola.

"In this age of mediocrity even crime becomes interesting; not because it *is* crime, but because it is dramatic. There is in us all an intense craving for the dramatic, because we are doomed to lives of such monotonous respectability, such deadly dulness. The poor man takes to drinking because his home is detestable; the rich man plunges into dissipation and goes to the devil because irritating social laws make every other course unbearable. I fear I startle you, Miss Sedley; but if you think over what I have said I believe you will come some day to admit that there is truth in this view. The Philistines and the great middle-class—backbone of the county—have much to answer for!"

"Every other course unbearable!"—had she heard aright?

The world was seized with an attack of vertigo; Good had flung its arm round the waist of Evil, and the two were waltzing together as if they had been partners in the dance from time immemorial. She scarcely understood what Philip meant by social laws; "she could not see the town for houses." Her

whole life had been passed under the shadow of these laws, and she was unable to conceive a state of things where they were absent or different. In any case she felt it her duty to struggle against the thoughts that Philip had suggested. She did not believe that he was a good man, and therefore it was necessary to be on her guard against his cleverness.

"A truce to these heresies," said Philip, with a smile, guessing her state of mind; "I want to hear your confession. I assure you of my forgiveness beforehand, if that is of any value in your eyes. Now, tell me, what was the secret enormity of which you were guilty at the time of my accident?"

"You talk lightly of the matter, because you don't believe I could be guilty of——"

She hesitated and coloured painfully.

"Let me help you," said Philip, more and more interested; "you really *did* put poison in my medicine?—is that it?"

"Oh, no, no! not so deliberate as that," cried the girl, thrusting away the idea as if it were something tangible; "but when you were sitting at the edge of that window in the ruin, you remember, and you made me so angry; well, for a moment, as I flung myself upon you, I actually *meant* to push you over if I could. It was a moment of insanity, but a thousand lifetimes could not blot it out; it is with me, now and for all eternity."

Philip looked at her, deeply pondering.

By some instinct that comes at the right moment to born rulers of men, he felt that he ought not to make too light of this matter. Viola's sense of guilt gave him a valuable handle by which he could work upon her feelings. He looked away without speaking, and allowed the silence to prolong itself painfully.

"You don't think me interesting for committing a crime when it comes to the point," said Viola at length, fixing her eyes straight before her.

Philip heaved a long sigh.

"Believe me, I admire the force of character that prompts to vigorous actions, but I confess I am sorry and surprised to learn this of you."

Smarting under the implied reproach, Viola was yet almost relieved to find that he did not take a light view of the matter.

Philip's instinct had been faultless.

"At the same time you must not forget that you were a mere child at the time, and therefore not quite responsible. Such an impulse would be impossible to you now."

"Oh, yes, of course—at least I trust and hope so; but that memory makes me frightened of myself. I don't know what may be in me."

"It would be interesting to find out," muttered Philip, more to himself than to her.

As he spoke, the sound of footsteps disturbed the serenity of the scene, and Philip made an impatient gesture.

It was only Mrs. Russell Courtenay and Harry, who were taking a stroll round the garden together.

"Oh, here you are again!" cried the lady. "How comfortable you look!—Mr. Dendraith, I do think you are the laziest person I ever met."

"Do you not know the wisdom of the Persians, Mrs. Courtenay, who say that you should never walk if you can ride, never ride if you can sit, and never sit if you can lie."

"And never live if you can die, they ought to add," said Harry, "if they want to be consistent."

"I expect they don't," said Philip. "Miss Sedley and I have been talking over old times," he went on, "and we have come to the conclusion that the past is a mistake, and that there is no time like the present."

As this was a sheer invention on the spur of the moment, Viola looked at him in astonishment.

"Miss Sedley, you make a very bad conspirator," he said, laughing; "you don't enter into the spirit of the creative genius at all; you should never stare in a thunderstruck manner at such a simple *jeu d'esprit*. I assure you it is disconcerting in the highest degree."

"Don't spoil that beautiful innocence," cried Mrs. Courtenay. "Well, Mr. Lancaster, I think our motto is 'Excelsior,' is it not?"

"Are you not coming for a stroll too?" asked Harry, addressing the others.

"I abominate that motto," said Philip.

"Well, good-bye; and I do hope you won't propound any more heresies to Miss Sedley. I don't know what her mamma would say," cried Mrs. Courtenay.

"Wouldn't it be pleasant to go for a short stroll too?" Viola suggested; "the great heat is over now."

"What, you too tormented with this disease of energy! So be it then: let us away; your will, of course, is my law."

Harry heard their footsteps following, and rejoiced.

CHAPTER XII.

A WORKING HYPOTHESIS.

PHILIP DENDRAITH had never been troubled with shyness. He did not hesitate to present himself every day at the Castle, openly telling Lady Clevedon that her house had so many attractions to offer an idle man that she must take the consequences. He made no secret of his preference for Viola's

society, singling her out with flattering persistence, and putting forth all his powers of fascination. She had begun to exert a very potent spell over him, rather to his own dismay.

As for Viola, her manner was already improving under the influence of the new experience. The first coat of paint had been laid on, as her aunt said.

When Harry called one afternoon he found, to his annoyance, that Philip was as usual among the groups under the beech-tree on the tennis-ground. He and Viola were standing a little apart, Viola playing nervously with a bunch of June roses which she had in her hand.

"Do you remember," Harry overheard him saying to her, "do you remember yesterday afternoon that you dropped a rose you were wearing, and you walked back along the way you had come, in hopes of finding it?"

Viola gave a gesture of assent.

"I had not the courage then to confess my sin (let us repeat our stroll of yesterday, by the bye); but it lies heavily on my conscience, and I am come to-day to ask for absolution. Here is the lost treasure."

Harry saw him bring out of his pocket a withered rose, just as the two figures turned a corner and disappeared into the shrubberies. He would have given worlds to hear what followed.

When they presently returned the rose was still in Philip's hand. What did that mean? Had he obtained absolution and leave to keep the rose as his own? Or had she treated the whole incident as too trivial to notice? For the first suggestion, Viola seemed too repellent; for the second, too shy.

As often happens in life, circumstances must have obliged her to do violence to one side or other of her nature.

Harry pondered very deeply upon the state of matters at the Castle. He suspected that Lady Clevedon had been urged by her brother to bring about a marriage between Viola and the heir of Upton Court. No marriage could be more unsuitable. For Viola it could not fail to prove disastrous; she was as a bird in the hands of the fowler; Philip's power was of a cold and watchful order, not to be gainsaid.

Perhaps in the long-run her force of character might be no less than his, but it was of a different kind. She was open to pain, while he was insensible. He was a man, she was a woman; he, a man more than usually callous, more than usually overbearing; she a woman more than usually sensitive, more than usually disposed to prefer the claims of others to her own.

"Will nobody play the part of Perseus to this Andromeda?" thought Henry. "Ah! how powerless a man is to help a woman, however much he may wish to do so!—especially if"—Harry pulled himself up abruptly. "This comes of idleness," he said to himself impatiently; "the sooner you return to your duties the better, my friend! Have you steered

your course so far prosperously, with philosophy for your compass and hope for your lode-star, only to fall into this pit-fall after all? It won't do; it is folly, accursed folly, and will only lead to heart ache! You can't do things by halves, so if you are wise you will escape while there is yet time. But *is* there yet time? Don't ask yourself that question, you fool, or you are lost; and don't flatter yourself you can do anything to help her. As for the appealing look that you see in her eyes, that is simply the effect of your own imagination, the result of 'expectant attention,' as Dick Evans would say. Philip is too much for her powers of resistance; her will flutters helplessly at the call of his. Ah! it is an iniquitous piece of work altogether."

On the next occasion that Harry went to Clevedon, Mr. Sedley was there, making himself agreeable to Arabella, and behaving in his best and sweetest manner. This was an evil portent. He had proposed a walk to the sea, and Harry was asked to join the expedition.

As Viola and Philip were of the party he assented,-and he had the pleasure of listening for two long miles to the not very interesting conversation of Mr. Sedley while the other couple walked ahead. Mr. Sedley was inclined to hang back to examine the crops, about which he had much to say. These were now in their freshest and greenest stage, gleaming and glistening under the blandishments of the sun, which seemed to be enticing the young life to new and ever new development, to end, as Harry moodily thought, in the final massacre of harvest.

The parable was painfully obvious. Seldom had he felt more sad and depressed than he did to-day amidst these sunny lands, where peace and plenty beamed with rosy midsummer faces, while the sea sang its eternal slumber song a few hundred feet below.

In another month or less he would be in another country, taking his part in a new drama, and alas! in that new drama he felt not the faintest interest.

Life seemed a miserable tantalizing, disappointing failure, full of heart-ache and tragedy; the sunniest temperament in the world could not save one from the universal doom.

So little would suffice for happiness, thought Harry! Freedom, work, leisure, music, friendship, and—love. He did not demand fame or fortune, luxury or power; only those essentially human requirements, without which no life is happy or complete.

In consequence of Mr. Sedley's delays the other two had now gone a long way ahead, and Harry watched them nearing the cliff's edge, and the point where the pathway of descent began. A superstitious feeling possessed him that if they went down that descent together, Viola's fate was sealed. It would symbolize the future. He tried to urge his companion forward, but Mr. Sedley was relating an anecdote, and

would not be hurried. In fact he found it necessary to pause now and then for greater emphasis.

Muttering an unintelligible apology, Harry broke away and set off at a run. But he was too late. He saw Philip hold out his hand, Viola place hers in it, and then the two went down together.

Harry felt as if something were tightening about his heart, as he stood there facing the breezes that came freshly up from the sea.

The sunshine was beating upon the sweet down grass and flowers just as before, and the sea murmured mournfully in the bright loveliness of the scene; "the gladness is taken away, and the joy out of the plentiful field." Oh! the folly, the madness, of staking one's whole life upon one human being among the millions, so that the very heavens and earth might be blotted out, or left dark and ruined in their places!

The folly and the inevitableness of it!

* * * * * * * *

"I wonder what is the matter with Harry," Adrienne said to Dick Evans, whose friendship for her brother made him a suitable confidant on this topic. "I never saw him so moody and distracted; I can't think what's come to him."

"I suppose he hasn't got a rash anywhere?" inquired the scientific Dick, thoughtfully. But Adrienne laughed at this suggestion.

"Liver may be out of order," said Dick. "Does he eat well?"

"Like a cormorant. No, it isn't his liver. I think (if he *is* to be out of sorts, poor boy!) it would be more convenient if it *were* from a housekeeping point of view."

"He must be in love," said Dick, stooping at last from the pinnacle of science.

"Nonsense!" cried Adrienne, startled. "Oh, dear? I hope not: it would be such a serious matter with him, and I don't see how it could be otherwise than unfortunate. You know that he has only a couple of hundreds a year besides his pay."

"Don't distress yourself in this anticipatory manner, Adrienne," advised Dick; "I put forth the suggestion merely as a working hypothesis."

That working hypothesis haunted Adrienne all night. She longed to speak to her brother and comfort him if she could, for her nature was essentially sympathetic; but Harry made some nonsensical reply to every tentative remark, and she had, as usual, to give in.

Mrs. Dixie, unaccustomed to her son's new mood, laughed inappropriately when he was remarking to the effect that all is vanity; and when she discovered that Harry actually meant that all was vanity, she had a whispered consultation with Adrienne about camomile pills, and wondered if he would be very angry if she sent for the doctor.

In spite of his wise reflections, the young man went the next day to Clevedon. Apparently some arrangement for prolonging Viola's visit had been come to on the occasion of her father's call, for Harry found with distress that she was not, after all, to leave at the end of the week. This looked very like a conspiracy between brother and sister, of which the girl was to be the victim. Sorely she needed a champion, but who was to take that difficult post? Harry did what he could: he tried to prevent too many solitary wanderings with Philip, regardless of the latter's frowns; and he did his best to turn Viola's attention from her admirer, or to rivet it, if that were possible, upon himself.

There was very little to be done, and Harry feared that Lady Clevedon would be annoyed at his interference, carefully as he tried to veil it.

Philip at this period was in his happiest mood,—not at all a good sign, thought Harry, especially as he seldom mentioned Viola's name. He was loud in his praises of the host and hostess. As for Lady Clevedon, she was one of the most agreeable women Philip had ever met; and, ye gods, wasn't she sharp!

If Harry seemed moody and out of sorts in the bosom of his family, he took care not to let that accusation be made against him elsewhere. Philip, above all, must not suspect his secret.

"I will say this for Lady Clevedon," said Philip, expansively,—"she knows how to make her house attractive better than any one I ever met; and what women she picks up! Arabella is simply bewildering!"

"So her host seems to think—a man who would 'rather face a crocodile than meet a ladies' school!' I believe that when all secrets are made known, that poor fellow will be found to have undergone excruciating agony on account of Arabella."

"Hail Arabella!" exclaimed Philip, raising an imaginary bumper to his lips; "tricksy, wicksy Arabella, sweet and stylish Arabella, who would not love thee, Arabella!"

"Poor woman! I am sure she does her best to please you, you ungrateful fellow!"

"I am tired of women who try to please me," said Philip, stretching himself lazily; "it's quite extraordinary how they will run after a man, in these days of universal competition! The marriage-market is overstocked; a woman has to get married at all hazards, and she will stick at nothing in the way of business. A man must be circumspect indeed to escape the dangers that beset him in the highways of society. 'He that fleeth from the worse of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare.'"

"Well done!" exclaimed Harry. "I didn't know you could quote Scripture."

"My dear fellow, I was brought up on it; perhaps that may account for my cynicism regarding the adorable sex. How-

ever, I need no excuse; if you had run the gauntlet with as many mothers of daughters as I have, you would be a blasphemer too. They are simply pirates on the high seas."

"It must be hard lines on a girl who doesn't want to be flung at a man's head to have a predatory mother."

"Show me that girl, and I will wear her in my heart of hearts."

"Well, without aspiring for that honourable post for my sister, I may point to her,—and then there is Miss Sedley."

Philip smiled. "Miss Sedley is inexperienced, and she has been seriously brought up."

"I doubt if all the mothers in Christendom would have made her into a fisher of men!" Philip shook his head.

"Lives there a woman who is not Fortune's slave? Upon my soul, I believe (with the exception of one or two who don't know anything about life) that such a being does not exist!"

"She must be a considerable heroine, I admit," said Harry; "for Fortune is hard upon women who refuse her obeisance, and in point of fact I suppose even a woman must live! My sister, at least, goes so far as to hint it."

"Well, I suppose she must, in spite of Talleyrand!" said Philip, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Henry VIII. when he cleared away the monasteries might have left the convents, I think."

"Do you? Ask my sister and Mrs. Lincoln what they think on that subject."

"Oh! Mrs. Lincoln's eccentricity puts her out of court," said Philip.

The appearance of Viola at this juncture interrupted the colloquy. Philip sprang up and waved her to his place on the seat, and Harry rose also.

"Please don't move: my mother is here—she came about two hours ago; and Aunt Augusta says will you come in and see her, Mr. Dendraith?"

"With the greatest pleasure; but how cruel of her to send such a messenger!" cried Philip, allowing his meaning to be guessed by the ingenious. "Lancaster, try and be entertaining enough to keep Miss Sedley till I return;" and he strolled off with his easy swinging walk across the grass.

"Philip has set me a task I don't feel at all equal to," said Harry, piercing a plantain through the heart with his stick.

"Never mind;" Viola returned, "you are always entertaining."

"A man can take no heavier burden upon himself than the reputation of a buffoon," said Harry; "never more—though the *rôle* of chief mourner would better become him—may he lay it down."

"Are you a chief mourner?" asked Viola, her voice softening at the call for sympathy.

"I am indeed," said Harry, "and sole mourner too, if that is not paradoxical."

There was a pause; and then the very atmosphere around seemed to throb, as Harry heard his own words escape him: "My trouble is on your account."

"On my account!"

Her surprise made him add hastily,

"I ought not to have said this much, as I can't say more; —in fact, I fear I am very impertinent to speak at all: it was not premeditated."

She looked bewildered.

"I wish you would tell me frankly what you mean," she said. "You don't know of any impending misfortune for me or mine, do you? No; if you did, you could scarcely take it so much to heart."

"There you mistake," said Harry; "but—" he pressed his hand to his brow,—"I ought really not to have spoken in this way. Forget and forgive it."

It was impossible to speak out, it seemed so underhand, so mean, especially since he had a new and selfish motive to prevent the marriage.

If Philip had now won the girl's heart and was trying to win her hand, what right had any one to interfere? It was not as if she were actually being forced into the marriage. On the other hand, could this inexperienced creature, brought up to submit her own will in all things, be regarded as a free agent, when people like Lady Clevedon, Philip Dendraith, Mrs. Sedley, and even Arabella were conspiring against her?

"If you can warn me about something and will not, Mr. Lancaster, I think you are unkind," said Viola, reproachfully.

"Oh! don't say that; if you know how it hurts me to hear it, you would not," he exclaimed. "What can I do?" He paused in deep and painful thought. "This much I think I may say, and I trust to you to take it in good part: It is my earnest advice to you to leave this place as soon as possible, no matter on what pretext, and if possible to leave the neighbourhood also for a time; at any rate, refuse to see, or avoid seeing, all callers. I know it sounds ridiculously like an advertisement in the Agony Column, but I can't help that. If you would only take what I say on trust, and not demand further explanation, you would do me a very great favour. My desire to serve you is most heartfelt, believe me."

His manner and the thrill in his voice amply confirmed his words.

Viola's reply was cut short by the arrival of Philip and Arabella, and Harry had no means of finding out for the rest of that day how she had taken his strange advice, or whether she intended to act on it.

With increased seriousness Mrs. Dixie on his return to the cottage began to talk of sending for the doctor, and Adrienne to ponder over Dick Evans's 'working hypothesis.'"

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRISIS.

"WELL, Marion, what now? Has Richard been forgetting he is a gentleman again? Drinking, swearing, or both?"

In his sister Mr. Sedley always found one of his severest critics.

"I did not come here to complain of my husband, Augusta."

"I wish to Heaven you had! You really ought not to allow him to trample on you as he does. Remember, a man will always be as much of a brute as you will let him."

Mrs. Sedley was silent.

"Well, Marion, what is the trouble?" again asked Lady Clevedon with a shrug of the shoulders.

"It is about my poor daughter; her father has been speaking to me very peremptorily on the subject of her marriage."

"He spoke to me about it, too," said Lady Clevedon, "NOT peremptorily," she added with a laugh.

"He has so much respect for your judgment," said Mrs. Sedley.

"He has such a wholesome dread of my agile tongue," said Lady Clevedon. "Well, Marion?"

"Mr. Dendraith has spoken to Richard on the subject, and asked his consent to an engagement between him and Viola, but he has not yet spoken definitely to Viola herself."

"I thought it was coming to that," said Lady Clevedon, "and I think it is a matter for much rejoicing. The girl could not make a better marriage, and I need not remind you of the important bearing that it will have upon the affairs of the family in general—the boys, and so on."

Mrs. Sedley sighed. "Yes, I do not overlook all that, but—will this marriage be for Viola's happiness? I fear greatly that Mr. Dendraith is a man of no religious principle."

"Perhaps he may have what is better," said Lady Clevedon, with Pagan calmness: "moral principle."

"I fear he is not even all one might wish as to that, if one is to believe rumours."

"He has his enemies. I dare say he is not immaculate, but I think he is just the man for Viola; he is born to rule, and has the devil's own temper; women are all the better for a little frightening."

It had, however, never occurred to Lady Clevedon to look out for the terrific creature who could frighten *her!*

"Before Viola came to stay with you," continued Mrs.

Sedley, "she made her father very angry by avoiding Mr. Dendraith when he called; Richard spoke to me about it, and insisted on my using my influence to bring her to a different frame of mind. It was very painful to me, for the poor child took it so much to heart, and cried out that even I had forsaken her."

"So you told me at the time," said Lady Clevedon, "and very miserable you were about it!"

"Now, however, by all accounts," Mrs. Sedley went on, "she seems to be changing in her feelings towards Mr. Dendraith; is that really the case?"

"He has certainly made an impression."

"Ah, that troubles me!" cried Mrs. Sedley, "that troubles me greatly."

"Oh, was there ever such a determined miserable!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon impatiently. "To-day she comes to me like Niobe, all tears, because her daughter is not favourable to the marriage proposed for her by her parents; she comes to me once more—the identical drops still wet upon her cheeks, ready to do duty over again; but this time because the daughter *is* favourable to the marriage. My dear Marion, what would you have?"

"I would have my child both good and happy, and I am sadly afraid that no woman can hope for such a combination in this sad world."

"Depends on what you mean by good, and what you mean by happy."

"My position," continued Mrs. Sedley, "is the more trying, because dear Viola would do anything that I asked her to do. She makes me her guide and almost her conscience. How can I persuade her into this marriage, which I fear may not be for her happiness, and how, on the other hand, can I urge her to oppose her father's will? Can the blessing of Heaven descend upon the rebellious child, or upon the mother who encourages her rebellion?"

"If the woman hasn't ingeniously got herself impaled upon *another* two-legged dilemma!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon. "How *do* you manage to fall in with all these monstrosities? You can't be content with a sound, able-bodied trouble like any other Christian; you must needs pick up creatures with more heads and limbs than they ought to have—a sort of Briarean woe dreadful to contemplate! If you had been a general, Marion, the Caudine Forks is the battle that you would have fought, and straightway you would have gone and got yourself inextricably wedged between the prongs!"

"I think life is made up of these many-sided difficulties," said Mrs. Sedley sadly. "Augusta," she went on, laying her hand on her sister-in-law's arm, "you have influence with Richard; should the poor child really show an invincible repugnance to the marriage, you will not refuse to use it on her side?"

Lady Clevedon shook her head.

"I can't promise anything. The marriage seems to me so rational, that I hope Viola will be wiser than to show any repugnance to it. I don't think, mind you, that a girl should marry a rich man whom she dislikes, but there is no reason to dislike a man simply because he is rich and well born. Many romantic girls make a point of doing that as in duty bound."

No help was to be had from Lady Clevedon in this matter, and Mrs. Sedley had then to come to the second object of her visit, namely, to take Viola back to the Manor-House. Her sister-in-law scoffed and scorned and insisted that her niece must stay, but Mrs. Sedley was quietly determined.

She did not mention that the girl had herself written earnestly entreating her mother to recall her.

Strangely still and lifeless seemed the old home when Viola saw it again after her ten days' absence. With all its familiarity, it was to her as if she had never seen the place before. And the routine of the days without change, without movement; they were like a stagnant, overshadowed pool, where there was never a glimpse of the blue heaven, never a ripple or a sparkle from dawn to dark. Viola thought the life at Clevedon empty and flippant, but at least it had some flash and brilliancy.

She felt restless and unhappy. She could not settle to her old life; memories of the past ten days haunted her, and filled her with vague longing for excitement.

Some new chord in her being had been touched; she was angry with herself, angry with her surroundings, ashamed at her own inability to resume her former simple life. She felt she had lost ground; new feelings made havoc with her self-control; she was like a rudderless ship at the mercy of contrary winds.

Gardening was the best sedative for this restlessness, though that occupation had the disadvantage of allowing her thoughts to work as well as her hands.

Contrary to Mr. Sedley's hopes, Philip Dendraith did not at once follow up his preliminary overtures. He was reported to have gone up to town, a proceeding which caused much suffering to the family of the Lord of the Manor. Mr. Sedley suspected that Viola had rebuffed her lover, and she had to listen to some parental plain-speaking on the subject.

"If it were not for my mother, I would not remain here another moment!" Viola had once cried out, passionately, bringing down upon her head such a torrent of rage and scorn that she left her father fully meaning to do even as she had said. Such taunts were more than she could endure. But at the sight of her mother her resolution broke down; she could not make yet sadder that sad pale face, and bring tears to the eyes that had shed so many bitter ones already.

On one balmy afternoon, Viola, hoe and basket in hand, be-

took herself to the garden, a narrow grass-plot beside the Lover's Walk, as it was called; a dark pathway of yew-trees, which formed a tragic background to the beds of roses and summer flowers among which Viola was moving, busy with her scissors and her hoe.

She was dressed in white, and her sunlit figure stood out in strong contrast to the shadows behind her. A fanciful person might have seen symbols in the picture.

A tame jackdaw hopped nimbly around, amusing himself with pecking at pieces of stick, and hauling weeds out of Viola's basket on the sly.

"Charming!" cried a voice breaking the sunny silence. "Would that I were an artist!"

Viola turned, and the admired picture was by no means marred by the addition of Philip Dendraith's handsome figure as he raised his hat and advanced towards her.

She coloured, and smiled in a manner that pleased him well. "So it is to you that the Manor House owes it wonderful roses! *L'art d'être belle!* What better teacher could they have?"

Viola sighed. She wished she could understand this man, but not being able to do so, she resigned herself to her ignorance.

"I find they best learn how to be beautiful by being happy," she said; "so I try to make them so."

She was going on with her hoeing in a desultory way.

"And you make them happy by bestowing upon them the light of your presence!" said Philip in a low voice.

"And by introducing to them my most agreeable friends," added Viola with a quick glance.

Philip almost started; the speech was so unlike one of Viola's. He had expected blushes and downcast looks, and he encountered instead something distantly approaching mockery.

It was one of those excursions from her normal character which had sometimes surprised herself of late. The rhythm and ring of the talk at Clevedon seemed to be ringing in her ears, as the characteristic cadence of an author will haunt one after reading, creating mental echoes which may escape in speech.

"Now, dear Miss Sedley, I think you have worked long enough," said Philip, taking the hoe from her with gentle insistance. "Your roses have had you all to themselves too long; it is my turn now to be made happy, and if possible, beautiful."

"I make my roses happy by watering them."

"Miss Sedley!" exclaimed Philip, looking round at her. "I am afraid you have become rather flippant since I had the pleasure of seeing you!"

"Oh no! oh no!"

"Don't deny it; it is quite charming, I assure you. Only please don't be too hard upon *me*."

Without reply, she allowed herself to be led to the rustic seat opposite the sundial whereon the jackdaw sat, alternately preening his feathers and pecking at the shadow with his beak.

The bird seemed agitated when Philip took his place beside Viola.

"Your jackdaw is apparently jealous," he said. "No doubt you are very fond of him. I should imagine you had a large power of loving."

"And of hating," said the girl.

"Yes; I can answer for that!" exclaimed Philip with a laugh. "Don't you think now that you owe me some reparation for having hated me so fiercely in the days of yore?"

She looked troubled.

"Don't you think," Philip went on, drawing nearer to her, "that if the possession of your love had become the supreme desire and object of my existence, that you ought at least to try to give it me?"

Viola breathed very quickly, but answered nothing.

"You must know, dear Viola, that such *is* my desire; you have entered and possessed my heart as I thought no woman ever could have possessed it; you have enslaved my thoughts, my dreams, my very will! This last week has been a blank to me, because you were absent. I am telling you the absolute truth when I say that I have never felt before what I feel now, and that I shall never be happy till you promise to love me and be my wife."

He was so much in earnest that he had thrown off his usual calm manner, and his measured periods had given place to the rough, quick utterance of strong feeling.

There is something peculiarly moving in the emotion of a person generally self-possessed.

"Viola, don't turn away from me; tell me, do you not love me?"

"Kiaw!" said the inconvenient jackdaw in a loud voice.

This was merely a displeased comment upon the arrival of Thomas with a watering-pot, Thomas not being in the habit of showing that deference towards Jack which Jack thought was his due.

"Unwelcome old man!" exclaimed Philip; "and you most obstructive fowl, I anathematize you both! Who was it that said that a woman can forgive everything in her lover, except that he should appear ridiculous? Have I committed the unpardonable offence?"

"Oh!—don't talk to me like this!" cried Viola with a desperate gesture. "I am not a clever lady of society who can understand and answer you."

She looked round in search of Thomas, but that discreet person having (after a certain lapse of time) seen what was

going on, took his watering-pot, and trudged off to pastures new, with an expression about his left eye absolutely beyond human power to describe.

Geoffrey finding him in this sublimated state of knowingness, and receiving from him sundry oracular hints, was prepared for the worst, as he said, especially as he found his father in a seraphic temper pacing the terrace with Mrs. Sedley, and calling her attention to the exceeding fineness of the immemorial elms. Those elms were in process of being secured to the family perhaps for centuries.

"I fear you think that because I am sometimes flippant, I can never be serious," said Philip earnestly, "but you never were more mistaken in your life. I own that I think very few things of much consequence, but for that very reason I have the more ardour to throw into those that I *do* care about. Ah! Viola, don't tell me that I have set my heart on the unattainable."

The conflict that was going on in her mind at this moment was entirely unsuspected by Philip; he supposed that her efforts to silence him proceeded from mere girlish bashfulness, and that he had only to persevere in order to complete his triumph.

He leant forward and took her hand.

"Dearest," he began, and then stopped, for at his touch Viola had drawn her hand away with a sharp movement anything but suggestive of a triumph for her lover.

"I wish you would not speak in this way—you distress me."

"Viola, I think you are really very unkind," cried Philip, "when you know how devoted I am to you!"

"I am very sorry," was all that she would say in reply to this and to other pleading of the same kind.

Philip was astonished, piqued, but all the more determined to achieve his object. He knew that practically it was achieved already, for he had her father on his side, and through him Mrs. Sedley also; that was enough: only he longed to make the girl come to him willingly and gladly. As a last resource alone would he employ the parental influence, but he had no intention of giving up the girl, let come what would.

Did he not love her as he had never loved before, and was he not ready to lavish upon her every indulgence that money and influence could command? If an unwilling bride, she should become a loving and a happy wife; and what more could the heart of woman desire? Besides, a woman of Viola's type was the slave of her conscience. Duty, religion, convenience, all came trooping to the front after the wedding-ring was once fairly on; a man ran no risk in choosing a bride of this kind, however unwilling she might be at the time. He could safely calculate on that. Truly mothers like Mrs. Sedley ought to be encouraged.

"Viola, am I then entirely indifferent to you?" asked Philip. "Would you not care if I were to go away and never come and see you any more?"

Her truthfulness obliged her to confess that she would care, and Philip pressing his advantage made her own that he sometimes had a sort of fascination for her.

"Then why do you repel me as you do? Why will you not accept my love?"

"Oh! don't ask me, for pity's sake,—don't speak of this any more."

Philip was fairly puzzled, and not a little annoyed.

He was silent for a moment, and then said with an abrupt energy startlingly different from his ordinary manner: "You are surely not engaged secretly to some one else?"

"Oh no, no!" she said quickly.

The expression of relief that came into his face was as astonishing as the anxiety that preceded it.

"Your affections are not engaged elsewhere?"

"No."

"Then I shall prevail! Think of your parents, Viola—if you will not think of me—think how happy you would make them. .I have already spoken to your father, and he gives his consent freely."

"I have no doubt of it," she said with some bitterness.

A smile flittered across Philip's face.

"And your good mother; she too has set her heart upon our marriage, though she may not tell you so, because she wishes your own heart to decide the question."

"My mother!" exclaimed Viola; "does *she* wish it?"

"She wishes it, undoubtedly; why not talk the matter over with her? I don't want to hurry you for an answer, impatient as I am to hear my fate. Will you do that? I will come to-morrow, not for your answer, unless you like, but merely to see you again. Do try and think of me as kindly as you can. Ah! dearest, it is hard to leave you in this state of suspense, but I suppose there is no help for it. *Au revoir;* and be merciful; my happiness is in your hands. Good-bye till to-morrow."

"Kiaw!" said the Jackdaw derisively.

CHAPTER XIV.

DECIDED.

MRS. SEDLEY was generally to be found in the morning-room, which she had chosen for her special domain. It faced north, was severely furnished, colour apparently not having been invented at the time of its upholstering. She was dressed in black, with dead-white folds of muslin at the throat and wrists.

When Viola entered, her mother was sitting working in a low chair; a quiet, grave figure, with smooth shining hair severely brushed down over the temples, the busy fingers alone giving signs of animation.

She looked up and greeted her daughter with a sad, loving smile.

"What is it, dearest?" she asked, laying her thin hand on the table.

Viola struggled with her habitual reserve for a moment; then she said: "Mother, Mr. Dendraith has just left me; and —I want to speak to you!"

Mrs. Sedley dropped her work; her hands trembled.

Viola had placed herself beside her mother with her back to the light. She leant her head on her hand and spoke in a quick low tone.

"Mr. Dendraith wants me to marry him; he says he will never be happy till I consent; he says that my father wishes it (which I knew) and that *you* wish it; is that the case?"

Mrs. Sedley took her daughter's hand in hers and silently caressed it for a few seconds. Then she bent her head and laid the little hand upon her brow with a movement more emotional than Viola had ever seen her give way to before.

"I will tell you all that your father and I have been thinking about the matter, dearest. You know that of late your father has had many business difficulties, so great that we shall not be able to live here much longer unless some relief comes. In proposing for you, Mr. Dendraith made most generous offers to your father, and as Mr. Dendraith is a man of good family and fortune, handsome, clever, and of agreeable manners, your father thinks that you can have no possible objection to the marriage. He is naturally anxious for it, as you may suppose, and he cannot understand that you may not care for Mr. Dendraith enough to marry him. Seeing your father so bent upon it, I entreated him to let you have ample opportunity to judge for yourself, and I think your visit to your aunt has given you some insight into Mr. Dendraith's character and your own feelings towards him. Your

aunt seemed to think that you were beginning to care for him." Viola looked startled. "Question your own heart searchingly, dear child, and consider too what is your duty in this matter. Pray for guidance where alone you can obtain it. I have thought and thought till my head and heart ache, and I have prayed; and I fear that I can see only one path of duty for you, my child. Earnestly do I trust that you may be given strength to tread it."

"Then you *do* desire this marriage?" said Viola.

"I desire only that my child should do what is right and dutiful, leaving the rest to God—her father, her brothers, all are depending on her decision——"

"And her mother!" added Viola, growing very white.

"Oh, do not think of *her*, my child! She suffers only through the sufferings of her dear ones. But your father's state of health gives me great anxiety, and if we should have to leave the Manor-House——"

"It would kill him," said Viola, "and you too!" Her face was hard and desperate.

"On the other hand," said Mrs. Sedley, "I do not wish you to enter upon this union if it is really repugnant to your feelings. That I cannot countenance. Consider the question from every side, and do not forget that this opportunity may have been given to you for the saving of this young man's soul."

"O mother! it is no more possible to talk to Mr. Dendraith about these matters than to Aunt Augusta! And who am I of little faith to move such a man?"

"We know not what instruments it may please the Lord to use," said Mrs. Sedley.

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"Well, Viola, your mother tells me that you have been speaking to her about Philip Dendraith's proposal. I hope you appreciate your wonderful good-fortune!" She was silent. "The affair had better be brought to a head at once; I can't understand why you didn't accept him on the spot, without girlish shilly-shallying. I am going over now to Upton Court, and will take your answer and settle the matter out of hand."

A moment of terrible inward conflict; Viola stood with bowed head and clasped hands, her mother's words burning into her brain: "duty—right—leave the rest to God—your father and your brothers—to leave the Manor-House might kill him!" And then above all rose the thought of that mother herself, racked and tortured in the impending misfortune of her family, the real weight of which would fall on her shoulders. Viola raised her head. The garden seemed to spin round her, the air became thick and black.

"I'll tell him you say 'yes,' of course," said her father.

"Tell him I say 'yes'!" repeated Viola.

CHAPTER XV.

BETROTHED.

SIR PHILIP, noted throughout the county for his dashing equipages, drove over to the Manor-House in the very sprightliest and jauntiest vehicle which it could enter the heart of man to conceive.

A brilliant pair of chestnut horses, high-stepping, spirited, always stylishly on the point of running away, came spanking down the avenue, "youth at the helm," and Lady Dendraith at the prow. Nothing would persuade the old lady to trust herself on the box-seat on her husband's chariots; she always took the post allotted to "Pleasure" in Etty's famous picture.

Philip, on the wings of love, had already arrived at the Manor-House where he and Viola with the radiant proprietor and his wife were assembled on the door-step to welcome the expected visitors. Sir Philip waved his whip in gala fashion, drew up the prancing chestnuts, sprang down, helped "the old lady" to alight, and broke forth into loud expressions of joy and satisfaction. The two fathers shook hands with the utmost effusion, exchanging boisterous jocularities, and between them making so much noise that the dashing steeds very nearly took fright and ran away down the avenue. Only Philip's dexterity prevented the calamity.

"Well, my dear, I suppose you won't refuse to kiss me *now*," said Sir Philip, patting Viola on the shoulder.

She made no resistance to the sounding salute of her father-in-law elect, but she did not receive it over-graciously. She was quiet and cold, and treated Philip with extreme politeness in return for his graceful and flattering homage.

However, the others were too preoccupied to notice this, especially as Viola received Lady Dendraith's hearty expressions of pleasure with answering warmth.

"My dear, there is no one I would rather have for a daughter-in-law than yourself, and I assure you this is to me the best news I have heard for many a long day!"

The Dendraiths stayed to luncheon, and heartily enjoyed themselves, Sir Philip undertaking to "chaff" the betrothed couple in his usual graceful fashion, to Viola's utter bewilderment and dismay.

Philip took it coolly; he owned to having got up an hour earlier than usual that morning in order to arrive in time for breakfast at the Manor-House, admitted with a "What would you?" air and a shrug of the shoulders that he had stolen Viola's portrait from her aunt with all the audacity of a thorough-

going house-breaker, and generally disarmed his adversaries by making more severe jests against himself than any one else was able to perpetrate against him.

He eat a most hearty meal, and betook largely of the champagne that Mr. Sedley brought out in honour of the occasion; altogether he was in his happiest mood, and appeared to brilliant advantage. His happiness was obvious, but this was clearly because he chose to take the company into his confidence. He even paraded it in a half-serious, half-jocular manner.

Fortunately for Viola, even after the departure of Sir Philip and Lady Dendraith, she managed to avoid a *tête-à-tetê* with her betrothed.

Her bewildered, unwilling, almost somnambulistic repetition of her father's words on the night before, had suddenly—as a whisper may start an avalanche—brought down upon her a series of consequences for which she was totally unprepared, and which she had not even realised.

The congratulatory visit of Philip's father and mother had startled her into the consciousness that a great step had been taken, and she now dreaded inexpressibly to be alone with Philip. How she was to meet him on the new footing she could not even imagine.

The position threatened to become very difficult, especially as Philip was far from pliable, and as Viola felt a certain undefined awe of him, partly on account of her sense that she did not understand him, partly because she felt the merciless grip of his powerful nature underneath the smoothness of his manner. In dancing, the most perfect lightness and grace is the outcome of strength, and this was what Philip's suavity also suggested.

He, on his part, had not found the day unsatisfactory in spite of Viola's rather repellant manner. After all, shrewd as he was, he failed—where so many shrewd men fail—in his interpretation of female character. He thought that Viola was simply a little shy. Perhaps a man's views about women are the crucial test of his own character: certainly if there is in him the slightest taint of vulgarity, there will it inevitably betray itself.

Whether through the educating influence of his sister's society, or by the help of some innate sense denied to average men, Harry Lancaster had always escaped the shallow but popular dogmas which are repeated so often and with so much *aplomb* that they come to be recognised in literature and life almost as axioms. Harry refused to accept these unexamined. "The superstitions of dogmatic religion," he once told his indignant sister, "are rejected scornfully by many who still bring their offerings to their social fetich with the simple faith of little children."

He had often laughed at Philip's cynicism, not because it *was*

cynicism, but because it was merely the echoes of other men's sneers.

Philip denied this. If ever a man was justified in being a cynic—especially about women—he was that man.

He admired Viola Sedley (as he frankly admitted) because she was so entirely unlike the women of society who had imbued him with a rooted contempt for the sex.

"In proportion as they are clever they are bad," he said; "safety lies in dulness: talent is agreeable to amuse oneself with, but stupidity is the thing to marry! That is the conclusion which my experience has led me to—though one does not always put one's theories into practice, mind you. Come now, you agree with me at heart, though that sister of yours won't allow you to say so. If you had a few thousands a year, my dear fellow, your ideas of human nature would marvellously alter—sister or no sister. By the bye, I have a piece of news for you—no, not about myself just at present—there is a chance of a friend of yours coming to settle in this neighbourhood; can you guess who it is?"

"Mrs. Lincoln?"

"Right. The divine Sibella! I wonder how you guessed? You know my father has a small house not far from Upton, and he has offered it to Mrs. Lincoln at a low rent—being glad to get it kept in repair. The mother is opposed to the arrangement; she doesn't think the 'Divina Commedia,' as I call her, a proper person. I tell her that the separation was *his* fault, but of course without effect. My father is dazzled with the Commedia's *beaux yeux* (though he denies it), and declares she is an injured and immaculate creature, deserving all sympathy. You know there was some scandal about a fellow—I don't remember his name?"

"Mrs. Lincoln shrugs her shoulders at the scandal!" said Harry.

"But my mother shakes her head. You seem ready to be her champion as of old! Well, she wants backing. Upton will not have her at any price."

"*Tant pis pour Upton.*"

"Well, she's certainly more attractive than her critics. How do you suppose Lady Clevedon will act in the matter?"

"I doubt if she will call," said Harry. "Mrs. Sedley herself is not more strict in her notions of propriety. My cousin always speaks of Mrs. Lincoln as 'that woman,' which does not look encouraging."

"The feminine anathema," exclaimed Philip, laughing. "How hard women are on one another!"

"Who is it says that a woman in the pillory restores the original bark to mankind?"

"Good," cried Philip; "the feminine 'yap, yap,' how sweet it must sound in the ears of the condemned!"

"Mrs. Lincoln once said to me that where a woman blames,

a man simply laughs disrespectfully, and gets credit for more tolerance while committing the greater cruelty."

"She is very keen," observed Philip.

"She also says that, take it altogether, there is perhaps nothing that a proud woman has more to dread than the approval of society."

"One of her many paradoxes. The 'divine' one is clever, but unbalanced. If she had played her cards well she might at this moment be held up as a model of all the virtues."

"Yes, but she objects to such bubble reputation," said Harry. "Upton need not imagine she is waiting in her best frock, with beating heart, for it to call upon her. Ten to one she won't notice whether she's called upon or not. She comes here to be quiet, not to be called upon."

"To 'wait till the clouds roll by,'" said Philip. "Well, that's piece of news number one; now for piece of news number two. Can you guess it also?"

Harry gave a visible start.

"Anything important?" he asked.

"Not, perhaps, as regards universal history, but as regards local celebrities, very much so."

"Local celebrities?—Mrs. Pellett has dismissed the pupil-teacher for wearing pink ribbons on Sunday."

"No; try again."

"Something very surprising?"

"Nothing ever surprised me more, I can assure you," said Philip with a laugh.

"Mrs. Pellett has been wearing pink ribbons herself?"

"No; something more astonishing than that."

"Mr. Pellett recognised her when he met her unexpectedly out walking?"

"No; worse than that."

"Arabella has joined the Salvation Army!"

"Good heavens, no! What next?"

"I am exhausted. Caleb Foster has ceased to allude to Kant, and has nothing to say about Socrates; Mrs. Pellett has attempted the life of the queen, and has been discovered with an infernal machine concealed about her person; Mr. Evans has given up trying to get subscriptions for a spread-eagle lectern (that 'abominable idol' condemned by our ancestors), and Mrs. Evans ceases to take an interest in the school-children's plain needle-work. Now I will sit down and rest; human ingenuity can go no further."

"This is embarrassing," said Philip. "I hoped you would have relieved me of the duty of making the announcement of my own engagement."

"*Engagement! You!* the despiser of women, the 'old bird' not to be caught with chaff,—you who have kept a firm front against battalions of seasoned veterans! Philip Dendraith, I blush for you!"

"I rather blush for myself, I admit," said Philip with a

shrug. "'He that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare,' you know. Well, it can't be helped: a man in my position has to marry some day, and I don't think Viola will make the bondage unbearable—nice disposition, you know."

"Very," said Harry drily. "Accept my congratulations. Is the engagement"—he stopped abruptly and cleared his throat—"is the engagement publicly announced yet?"

"Scarcely; we do not consider anything public till Mrs. Pellett has been confided in under pledge of secrecy. The matter was only settled last night; this morning the four parents have been congratulating one another, and I imagine by to-morrow 'Society' will be in possession of the facts."

"To-morrow 'Society' will enjoy itself," said Harry.

When he returned to the Cottage, Mrs. Dixie, who had been holding a levee during the afternoon, had the remains of her royalty still clinging to her. Upon her person were crowded massive mementos of those "palatial times" to which her son was always disrespectfully alluding.

"Well, mother," he said, kissing her, "tired out with pomps and ceremonies? 'Uneasy is the head that wears a crown.'

"My son," returned Mrs. Dixie, who might have made her mark in provincial melodrama had she not been called to higher things, "my son, your mother wears no crown but that of sorrow."

"Poor mother," he said, stroking the white hair affectionately; "there are many kings and queens so crowned."

Mrs. Dixie did not appear quite to relish the idea of a multiplicity of rival sovereigns. "Not many have been tried as I have been tried, Harry," she murmured. "I am sure it is all ordered for the best, but when I think of it!"—she sighed heavily,—"every luxury, a position in the county, always a private chaplain; and oh, what a man your father was!" exclaimed the widow ecstatically.

"Quite a luxury, I am sure," said Harry.

"Upright and honourable, respected wherever he went—and *such* religious principle! Connected with Lord Riversdale."

"That DOES tend to make a man religious," said Harry gravely. "Common gratitude——"

"Your father used always to thank Heaven whatever befell him," said Mrs. Dixie proudly.

"Even the Sunset?" inquired Harry.

"It was a great blow to him, of course," said Mrs. Dixie; "but as every one remarked, 'he seemed even more of a gentleman in his downfall than he had been in the time of his prosperity.'"

"They always are," said Harry, "and of course nothing but death could sever the Riversdale connection."

"Nothing but death," repeated Mrs. Dixie with solemnity.

Adrienne coming into the room at the moment, smiled and

nodded to Harry as she took up her work and established herself in an easy-chair, quietly listening and observing according to her custom.

"We were talking about death, Adrienne," said Harry. "No, not at all in a depressed manner—were we, mother? Quite the contrary."

Adrienne looked up keenly.

"Were you ringing his praises?" she asked. "You remember the fable of the man who invoked Death, and when he came did not receive him cordially."

"No one ought to call upon a man in his bare bones," said Harry; "it's not decent. The proprieties of life should be observed in all circumstances."

"Ah! your poor father used to be so particular about that," Mrs. Dixie put in piously. "He always said that if a man couldn't take the trouble to dress himself carefully when he came to see his friends, he had better stay away."

"That's exactly what I imagine the man said to Death when he arrived with the wind whistling through his ribs, and half his teeth out!" observed Harry.

"I never saw your father with his teeth out in my life," said Mrs. Dixie. "He was an example to us all, was your poor father."

"So you often used to say to our poor stepfather in the old times, mother," said Harry, with a laugh and an affectionate touch as he rose and left the room.

Adrienne watched him narrowly, and after he was gone she answered her talkative mother entirely at random, though long habit had made her skilful in carrying on a train of thought while conversing with the old lady.

When the little party of three assembled for the evening meal Adrienne thought that Harry was looking ill, and he seemed more absent-minded than usual, though talking spasmodically in his accustomed vein.

"Harry, you are not well," she said, when they were alone together in the garden, Mrs. Dixie being left to her evening nap in the little parlour.

"Am I not? What makes you think so?"

"Your appearance, your manner——"

"Oh, this accursed reputation for buffoonery!" he exclaimed impatiently; "if one is not perpetually standing on one's head, and stealing strings of sausages, *à la* pantomime clown, one must be ill or depressed. Is there any more awful fate imaginable than that of the man who must always be in good spirits?"

"My dear boy, I don't want to bother you; only it distresses me to see you look as you do."

"Oh, the ease and joy of the mourner with the broad hatband!" exclaimed Harry.

"If you are unhappy, dear Harry, can no one help you?" He was silent. "Can you not confide in me as you used to

do in the old childish days? Do not I know how bitter is the sorrow that is borne alone? Harry, there is nothing on earth I would not gladly do for you; don't you believe it?"

He pressed her hand, but turned away with a man's dislike to the expression of feeling, especially in the presence of a near relative.

"Nothing more has happened to me than has happened to hundreds of better fellows than I am," he said at last after a long pause.

A thrush was warbling from an old elm-tree behind the garden; a song sweet, clear, and plaintive, bringing the tears into Adrienne's eyes as she watched the set face of her brother. His profile was towards her, and he leant upon the little gate leading from the garden into the meadow where a cow was still contentedly grazing in the twilight.

"I am afraid the grief of other 'better fellows' does not make yours easier to bear," said Adrienne in a low voice.

"You don't think the eels get accustomed to skinning."

She shook her head.

"You show real intellectual acumen," he said, fantastically; "very few people understand that grief can be neither more nor less than one person can endure; that twenty sorrowing people represent really no more sorrow than is running riot in the soul of the chief mourner."

"O Harry, you are talking at random."

"No, I am quite serious. I have been thinking this out to-day. You cannot add pain to pain, your pain to my pain, and ours to the pain of Mrs. Pellett. One must begin afresh each time; the events of one organism cannot be mingled with the events of other organisms, as if they were all continuous. This truth carries with it many issues quite contrary to our ordinary ways of thinking, as a little reflection will show. Continuous sorrow is an impossibility."

Adrienne looked at him as he leant calmly on the gate, and sighed. She wished that he would confess and bewail his grief instead of philosophizing about "continuous sorrow." Did ever any human soul get real consolation out of philosophy when the real pinch came? Adrienne thought not. On the contrary, this keen, clear habit of mind must heighten the pain and enlarge its horizon. It was a misfortune to see too clearly and too far.

If only Harry would be less reserved! But the habit of treating everything in a light, half-humorous spirit had become so ingrained that he was unable to throw it off. "Few things in life are more tyrannous," he used often to say "than the *rôle* that gradually comes to be allotted to us. Only among strangers can we at last fling off the incubus and move our limbs in freedom."

"Adrienne," said Harry at last, "perhaps Mrs. Lincoln is coming to this neighbourhood shortly. Philip Dendraith told

me that his father had offered her 'Fir Dell' at a nominal rent, and I think in all probability she will take it."

Adrienne's face fell.

"Then it is as I feared, you still correspond with her."

"Certainly."

"Why is she coming here?" asked Adrienne.

Harry faced her.

"What do you mean? You think Mrs. Lincoln is coming on my account, perhaps? Well, since I am one of her few friends, it might not be an unnatural proceeding, but as I happen to be here only at long intervals I don't think I can flatter myself to that extent. I am very glad, however, that she is coming, and I wish, but of course in vain, that you might make her acquaintance."

Adrienne gave a little shrinking movement. "O Harry, I *could* not do that."

"Exactly; I knew you would say so: it is just for that reason that Sibella would do you so much good."

"But, Harry, did she not run away with some man or other after her marriage?"

"You know her story," said Harry; "it is a very common one, only it does not often end as hers does: The early engagement to suit her parental ideas; the waking of the girl to her fate; the roughness and brutality of the husband driving her to desperation; then the crowning sorrow of loving some other man. Sibella did not run away with this fellow,—a noble-hearted fellow he was too; he was my friend, so I ought to know,—but she loved him as few human beings are capable of loving; and, unlike most women, she did not consider herself bound by the iniquitous tie into which she had been morally forced before she was able to judge for herself or able to resist the will of those whom she was trained from her infancy to respect and obey. They betrayed her according to the time-honoured custom, trusting to her 'principles' to carry her through her ordeal—also according to the time-honoured custom. Her 'principles,' however, were not so accommodating; she left her husband after some wretched years of married life, during which her views of things had gradually changed; and at once 'the world' began to wag its head like a Chinese mandarin, and her parents now regard themselves as disgraced."

"She did not cease to see her lover," said Adrienne. "That was surely unwise—to put it as charitably as I can."

"Well, that is a matter of opinion," returned Harry. "Sibella thought it less terrible to be condemned by people she cared nothing for, than to be eternally denied the presence of one in whom her whole happiness was bound up. She had to choose, and that was how she chose. I am not justifying Sibella, understand; she does not wish to be justified; she could not be justified to the world—her standards and motives

are quite different from theirs. You have to know her to see what I mean."

"I have heard that Mrs. Lincoln is very eccentric," said Adrienne, coldly.

"She is not in the least like Mrs. Pellett or Mrs. Evans; nor, on the other hand, is she like Augusta or Arabella. I can find no one to compare her to; so clearly she must be eccentric."

"You know, Harry, that I don't care for people to be entirely conventional, but I do think that some respect ought to be paid to social ordinances; otherwise we should soon fall into a most chaotic and iniquitous state."

"I should describe our *present* condition in those terms," said Harry. "Have we not respectable and legalised iniquity for which there is no redress?"

"I think Mrs. Lincoln is wrong," said Adrienne; "but I am willing to admit that she may have much good in her."

"That is very kind of you, my dear!"

"O Harry, don't be angry with me; I have always felt so strongly that a woman should never permit the faintest breath of slander to approach her, that I don't feel as if I could ever like this Mrs. Lincoln. I can pity her."

Harry burst out laughing.

"You can't approach her in that spirit, my dear. She is like a wind from the sea; all your little prudences would be blown out of you in her presence before you knew what had happened."

"She must be a dangerous person."

"From your point of view, she is, very; from another point of view, she is one of the safeguards of society; one of the small band of people that keep it from going respectably to the devil altogether."

"Do you intend to call upon your 'safeguard' if she comes here?"

"Do I intend to call upon her?—Oh! dear, no; I am going to bow circumspectly from the other side of the road and pass on."

Adrienne sighed.

"Harry, forgive me for saying so; but I used to fear that you loved this woman at one time."

He turned and looked at her; then he said calmly:

"Well, so I did, and so I do."

"O Harry, my poor boy!"

"Don't pity me," he said; "my life would have been much emptier if it had not been for her."

"But the hopelessness of it, and—"

"And the impropriety of it, you were going to say." Harry looked out beyond the little garden to the star-sprinkled heavens and smiled. "Don't distress yourself, Adrienne," he said presently, laying his hand on her shoulder affectionately; "and don't jump too rapidly to conclusions.

Human nature is not quite so uniform or so easily understood as you appear to think. Rise to the achievement of the really great thinkers and realize that your theories and experience may not comprehend all, or nearly all, the wonderful facts of life and of the human soul."

CHAPTER XVI.

WITHOUT MERCY.

NO SLEEP did Viola have on that first night of her engagement. Her dismay at the thought of it increased with every black lingering hour as she lay tossing on her pillow, wondering at times if she were under the thrall of a horrible dream. It was all impossible; she could not go on with the engagement; surely Philip himself could not be in earnest about so preposterous an idea. He had said that he would ride over in the morning, about ten o'clock, and when the time drew near, Viola was seized with a panic, and flinging on her hat and cloak she rushed out across the garden and into the park, plunging into the deepest recesses of the underwood in order to escape detection in case of pursuit. She began to have an actual terror of the man to whom she was betrothed.

As she drew near to the park boundary, not far from the unused grass avenue—the great elm avenue which had never lost its fascination for her—she heard angry voices on the road outside: one of them was unmistakeably Philip's.

Through an opening in the trees she presently saw him standing with his left hand on the bridle of his horse, while with his right he thrashed the animal with all his enormous strength. The creature was flinching and tried to escape from the heavy blows; his glossy sides were bleeding and foam-flecked, and with every savage stroke of the whip he gave a desperate plunge.

Harry Lancaster, who had just come up, stood angrily remonstrating.

"How much longer are you going to keep up this?" he asked. "Can't you see the creature is half dead with pain?"

"One would think the horse was yours from the interest you take in his welfare," said Philip with a sneer, and using with renewed violence the cruel whip.

"Are you a man or a fiend?" exclaimed Harry. "I will look on at this devilry no longer. You are literally slicing the miserable beast with that whip of yours. Will you leave off, or must I interfere?"

"Interfere at your peril."

Harry's answer was to lay hold of the handle of the whip, and try to wrench it from the other's grasp.

Philip was forced to let go the bridle, and the horse started off at a gallop down the road, followed by a curse from his master.

"Meddlesome fool!" Philip muttered as the two struggled together by the roadside for several minutes, silent from very fury.

Viola looked on in horror, too dismayed to speak. This was the man whose honied phrases had been whispered so softly in her ear! This was her future husband! Well had that instinctive fear been justified! And yet with its justification it seemed to vanish. Viola could not feel frightened of a man who might be capable of physical violence towards her; that thought roused all her own latent fierceness and her instincts of revenge; her timidity was exorcised. It was the cool, suppressed, self-mastering power which had awed her in Philip Dendraith. Now she actually longed to do battle with him herself on behalf of the ill-used animal. Intense indignation deprived her of all fear.

Thrusting aside the boughs of the trees, she forced her way through a gap in the oak paling and stood with flaming cheeks before the combatants.

"Mr. Dendraith," she gasped, "you are a cruel, wicked man—I knew you were cruel, I felt it, and now I know, and I won't marry you, I *won't*,—and I hope I shall never see your face again as long as I live!"

She was trembling with passion, and her voice shook and gave way at the last word as if she were going to burst into tears. But her eyes were quite dry.

Even Philip had been a little disturbed by this sudden apparition and outburst. But he quickly recovered his self-possession and adroitly managed to put Harry in the wrong as he handed him courteously the disputed riding-whip.

"Allow me to confess myself vanquished—by the presence of a lady; the whip is yours!"

Harry laid it across his knee and snapped it viciously in two. The pieces he flung over the hedge into a turnip field. Philip laughed.

"Although the whip was a favourite one," he said, "I don't grudge it, seeing the intense enjoyment that you appear to derive from its destruction!"

"The next time you wish to chastise your horse, you can procure a more effective instrument; the Russian knout, for instance, does double the work with half the effort; however, I wrong you in supposing for a moment that you grudge trouble in the good cause!"

"Surely this is sarcasm or something very like it!" cried Philip. "Wrong me in supposing that I grudge any trouble,—very good; irony all through; quite a Russian knout sort of business: good deal of *lead* in it, don't you know?"

"I thought something heavy was quite in keeping," Harry retorted.

"Good again! But alas! while I linger here, listening to these lightsome sallies, our bone of contention is rapidly emigrating."

"Perhaps you had better go and gather up his scattered fragments," said Harry.

"Perhaps I had, and I can explain matters to you, Viola my love, when I return."

"I don't want an explanation," she answered; "everything has explained itself."

"So much the better; it is a pity to start with a misunderstanding. *Au revoir!*"

With these words he smilingly raised his hat and strode off at a gradually quickening pace down the road. Harry looked at Viola, and their eyes met.

"I hope you are not angry with me for my part in this affair!" he said at length.

"Angry! I am most grateful." Her voice was still trembling with excitement, and had an ominous break in it. They turned instinctively, and walked on towards the elm avenue.

Just as they were entering it, on the summit of the little hill, Viola suddenly stopped. At this point the sea was visible.

"Listen," she said; "do you hear how the waves are breaking to-day? When I was a child I used to fear that sound,—my nurse used to tell me that it bodes misfortune. Don't you hear how it moans?"

There was a startled look in her eyes, and as she spoke she stretched out her arm seawards, and then raised it above her head, standing so, like a prophetess.

"The waves bear you no ill-will, I am sure," said Harry, in a tone that he used only to Viola, "you who are almost a daughter of the sea."

"Yes," she said, still with deep excitement in her voice, "from my childhood it has sung to me and drawn me towards it so that the longing for it became a pain. I was forbidden to go to it, and that made the longing worse. Day and night, summer and winter, I have heard it, sometimes sighing very softly and sometimes full of lamentation; I think its great sweetness comes from its great strength. But oh! when it is stirred to its depths, its song is full of misery, so awful, that no words can possibly tell of it,—no words that ever human being spoke!"

Harry looked at her in amazement. What did this girl know of such misery? She must have terrible capacity for suffering or she could not interpret the voices of nature after so mournful a fashion.

And this was the promised wife of Philip Dendraith, a man who knew not what the word "pain" meant, who was capable of no feeling much keener than discomfort or

chagrin, except the feeling which prompted him to such actions as had led to the quarrel of the morning! Harry thrilled with indignation.

It was cruel, shameful!—the iniquitous work of a dissipated old spendthrift, who wanted to save himself from the consequences of his own sins, and of a narrow-minded woman who for all her maternal professions was ready to wreck her daughter's whole life for the sake of her own miserable piety! Before to-day Harry had fancied that Viola was a willing victim, but the scene of the morning dissipated that idea. Fate seemed to thrust him into the position of champion to this friendless girl,—worse than friendless indeed, he thought, for who is so lost and alone as a woman under the protection of those who betray her trust?

"Poor child with the mournful prophetic eyes, what can I do to save you? I who cannot face the thought of the future without you?"

"I am afraid you have been unhappy," he said aloud, referring to her last strange words about the sea; "perfectly happy people do not hear such things in the sound of the waves!"

She was silent.

"I fear," he said presently, "that you did not take my somewhat oracular advice which I gave you at Clevedon the other day."

"Would to Heaven I had!" she exclaimed; "I tried hard, but what could I do?—and besides——"

That "besides" meant more than Harry could fathom or than she would explain.

"If there is any way—no matter how—that I can help you, you will give me the chance," he said earnestly. "If I may presume to speak on the matter of your engagement, I must tell you that I think you have a perfect right to break it off after what you saw this morning. Such an exhibition of brutality is unpardonable!"

"Oh, I *can't* marry him—I can't, I can't!" exclaimed Viola with a desperate gesture.

"Then for Heaven's sake don't!" he exclaimed; "it is horrible to think of!"

"If you knew how I am placed!"

"I do know—forgive me—and that is what emboldens me to speak. However important may be the considerations which urge you to this marriage, they sink into nothing in comparison with those which ought to decide you against it. You don't know what you are doing! Your whole life is at stake, and my happiness!—forgive me; what can I do?"

"Have it boiled for supper with parsley sauce," rang a voice through the trees, and at the same instant appeared the stalwart form of Geoffrey with his fishing-rod over his shoulder, shouting dirsctions to the gamekeeper to take to

the cook on the subject of a trout that he had caught, weighing twelve pounds.

"Boiled happiness with parsley sauce!" echoed Harry with a rueful laugh.

"Holloa, you there!" Geoffrey called out; "bet you haven't had as good sport as I have this morning. Look here!" and he swung his bag round and displayed the spoil. "That fellow with the knowing eye gave me a lot of trouble; artful old dodger, but I hooked him at last—my twelve-pounder I have sent in to be cooked for dinner. Holloa, Viola!" exclaimed Geoffrey suddenly, looking from her to Harry. "Why, you have got the wrong man!"

His look of bewilderment was so comic, that Harry, heavy-hearted as he was, burst into a shout of laughter.

"But why is this?" persisted Geoffrey.

"'Cos t'other man's sick," quoted Harry.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth," said the tactless youth "I wish you *were* the man!" Harry coloured and turned, away.

"No such luck," he said jestingly.

"If t'other man, being sick, were to die," suggested Geoffrey, regardless of the feelings of his companions, "why then you might step into his place, and I'd give my consent and my blessing—and I'd ring the wedding-bells," added the graceless youth. "Ha! Hist! The enemy approaches."

Philip was coming down the avenue towards them at full speed.

"I've captured my Bellerophon," he said as he came up, "and taken him to the stables, where he is now enjoying a wash-down and a feed of corn. His frame of mind is enviable, I assure you!"

With the want of insight of even the keenest men where a woman is concerned, Philip treated Viola as if nothing had happened; and as she behaved, as far as he could see, much the same as usual, he thought her anger had blown over.

Harry and Geoffrey had to walk on ahead and leave the other two to follow; for Philip managed in such a way as to give them no choice.

"At last we are alone, dearest," he said, stopping and facing his companion, "and before we go a step farther we must ratify our betrothal in due form!" He put his arm round her waist and bent forward to kiss her. But she sprang back.

"What! still angry about that affair of the horse? What can I do to earn forgiveness? How shall I sue for my dear lady's pardon? I am all submission and repentance. Surely she will not refuse me one little kiss, if I ask for it, very humbly."

"I want you to release me from my engagement!"

"*Viola!*" His cheek flushed and his lips set themselves in a thin hard line. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Only too well."

"This is a blow for which I was totally unprepared," said Philip. "I hoped that you returned in some measure my boundless love for you; but if so small a thing can turn you —oh! Viola, this is bitter! Can I not win your love by any means? It looks as if—if I thought that fellow Lancaster had succeeded where I have failed——!"

A certain expressive tightening of the lips indicated his meaning.

"Viola, you are mine," he said, taking her hands in his firmly; "you have no right to withdraw from our engagement."

"You would not marry an unwllling bride!" she exclaimed.

"I would have *you*, Viola!"

She tried to loosen the grasp of his hands, but in vain.

"You have given me the power; you cannot take it back," he said.

"I entreat, I implore you," she cried passionately.

He flung away her hands.

"Plead so for any other thing in the world, and see how I will respond; but this—Viola, you try me too much."

"Put yourself in my place!"

"Do you so hate me, then?" he asked bitterly.

"Yes, at times."

He winced. "Blow after blow you inflict without mercy!"

"I had a lesson in that this morning," she said.

"That accursed horse again! O Viola! be merciful and be just. At present you are neither. You fling me away for one fault, accepting no apology." He stood looking at her for some seconds gloomily.

Then a light came into his eyes, and a fixed look about his mouth. "Why do I woo my betrothed?" he exclaimed. "She is mine, and she shall not escape me. Some day you will live to thank me for it; you shall be the happiest woman in England against your will!"

"And if I *did* become so, you would remain unjustified," she said.

"But not unrewarded!" he returned, with a smile that haunted her long afterwards.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADRIFT.

When Viola, trembling and excited, related the events of the morning to her mother, Mrs. Sedley appeared much dismayed; not indeed at the conduct of her son-in-law elect, but at her daughter's way of taking it.

"Dearest, you must not judge a man's character by his behaviour towards animals; the most tender-hearted of men, after all, find their greatest pleasure in slaying those dumb creatures over whom God has given us dominion. Men are all like that; and though I agree with you that Mr. Dendraith was wrong to lose his temper as he did, I cannot think that it would justify you in withdrawing from your engagement. The family would regard it as a mere pretext or a deliberate slight,—and think of your poor father!"

Viola turned very pale, and sank powerlessly upon a chair.

"The engagement is by this time made public," Mrs. Sedley continued. "The whole neighbourhood is discussing it; really, it is not possible, dearest, to draw back now. If your husband never does anything worse than beat his horse rather overhard, I shall not fear for your happiness. Surely you are not *afraid* of him?"

"Not *now!*" said Viola, with a gleam in her eyes.

"You can use your influence to induce him to treat his animals more humanely; he is devoted to you, and I have no doubt he will do that for your sake. Gentleness, patience, and obedience in a wife can work wonders."

O marvellous faith, that remains unshaken after a lifetime spent in proving its futility!

Philip did not leave Viola much time for considering matters, or for maturing her opposition. Although much piqued by her conduct, he put it down to mere girlish caprice. At the idea of giving her up, he laughed. When had he given up anything on which he had set his heart and his will? He had yet to learn that he could be beaten by a timid, ignorant, parent-ridden girl.

He came again to the Manor-House next morning, and behaved as if nothing had happened. Viola seemed tongue-tied. She treated Philip with a cold ceremony, which not even Mr. Sedley could mistake for a satisfactory bashfulness.

When Sir Philip patted her on the back and attributed her demeanour to this cause, she looked at him with steady, widely-opened eyes, and then gave a sad little flickering smile.

She made no attempt to repudiate the accusation. Old men had their own hereditary notions about girls and their ways, and it would take an enterprising girl indeed who should undertake to uproot them !

Lady Clevedon's quick eye saw that something was wrong.

"Harry," she said, "what's the matter here ? Is there a lovers' quarrel going on, or what ?"

"Do you want to know what is going on ?" said Harry. "I will tell you. Andromeda has been chained to the rock, for the gods are angry and must be appeased by sacrifice; the monster is about to devour her,—so that Andromeda is having a rather bad time of it just now—that's all !"

"My dear boy, she's in love with Philip; you are talking nonsense."

"She may have been so at one time, but she does not wish to marry him now. Some one ought to interfere. A man has no right to marry a woman against her will, it is monstrous !"

"Pooh ! What is a woman's will ?" asked Lady Clevedon.

"That *you* ought to know."

"Oh ! I was meant to be a man !"

"You are all making a great mistake about your niece," said Harry with renewed energy. "Every fresh event will strike the hidden springs of her character, and I am convinced she will develop into something that her family will not like if this moral coercion is persisted in. For my part I hope she will. She tries to tread in her mother's footsteps; but her nature is too passionate, she cannot do it,—for which Heaven be praised. Once she is fully aroused, the artificial imitative self which she shows at present will burn away like so much tinder."

"You are either very imaginative or very penetrating," said Lady Clevedon.

"Time alone will show which," he returned.

Perhaps it was the strange look in Viola's eyes which had suggested the prediction. The weather being stormy, the sound of the waves was more than usually distinct, and Viola seemed to be listening restlessly to that ominous moan, which had haunted her childhood with presage of misfortune.

Having promised to go with his mother on a round of calls, Harry had to return to the Cottage early, and Philip followed his example. He found Viola very unresponsive, and thought it prudent not to force his society upon her till her fit of ill-temper—as he called it—had passed off.

In the afternoon, when his servitude was over, Harry announced that he was going for a walk, and could not say when he might be back. He said that he panted for a breath of the sea. Very fresh and delicious the sea-breath was when he reached the shore, and stood watching the waves rolling in, and the foam sweeping to his feet. The wide freedom of the place, and the wonderful sea-freshness gave new audacity

to his impulses. Hesitations were overwhelmed as children's sand castles by the sweeping of a wave.

It was scarcely a surprise, only a great joy, on looking round at some instinctive suggestion, to discern the white fluttering garments of a figure which he could not mistake, even at this distance.

Viola was talking to Caleb Foster and pointing to a boat that lay on the beach. So intent and eager was she, that Harry's approach remained unnoticed till he stood beside her; then she started and coloured vividly.

"Ah, you are much wanted here!" said Caleb. "I have been explaining to this young lady that she can't manage a craft of that size—with an opinion of her own, too—on such a day. The waves are strong, and it may come on to blow harder any minute."

"I have often been out with Geoffrey and understand all about it," Viola said hastily, and colouring once more.

"Were you really going to attempt it alone!" cried Harry in dismay. "What can you have been thinking of! Presentiments do come true sometimes. I felt I should be wanted here to-night. Let me come with you if you wish to go; soldier as I am, I consider myself no bad seaman."

He held out his hand, and Viola, seeming half stunned by the frustration of her own design, allowed herself to be led into the boat.

"The centre of gravity is improperly adjusted," said Caleb. "A little more to the right, Miss Sedley, if you please. You will find the 'Viola' (as I call her in compliment to yourself) a brave little craft, but she wants humouring, like the rest of her sex."

"Like them, she answers to the touch of intelligence, and rebels against coercion. Isn't that it, Miss Sedley?" asked Harry, with a smile.

She shook her head. "I don't know," she answered; "I don't know anything!"

"Give a shove, Foster," said the young man.

Together they laid their weight against the boat and launched her; and as she grated off the beach, Harry sprang in, and the *Viola* darted eagerly forward through the surf into deep water. Harry gave an exulting wave of the hand towards the shore.

"Good-bye, old shore!" he cried, "good-bye to etiquette, and formality, and all the gags and muzzles of our crazy life, —good-bye to everything but the wind and the deep sea. There's an exordium for you," he added with a smile, as he sat down and took the sculls. "I won't ask were we shall go," he went on; "I will just go on at haphazard. This movement is glorious, isn't it? Look at those waves! how they curl, and how they are green, as the French would say. Now I am going to forget that you are Miss Sedley, and think of you as some sea-spirit, consolidated—like a nebulous young

world—out of sea-spray and ocean winds. Then I may say what I please to you, may I not?"

Viola smiled. She did not seem surprised at his buoyant, fantastic talk; the poetry of the scene had attuned her mind to his. Her pulses beat faster as the boat swung out to sea; she too thrilled at the sight of those heaving miles of green water. She leant over the boat-side to watch the sculls dipping with even recurrence into the deep; and her face seemed to grow every moment more beautiful as the bondage was unloosed and the half-released spirit fluttered out—as a panting bird from its cage—into the sweet bewilderment of sudden freedom. Her hat, which threatened to be blown off, had been discarded, and she had no covering for her head but her own thick hair, which was fluttering in the wind.

"I need no help now to believe you are a spirit of the sea!" exclaimed Harry. "You only want a crown of sea-weed to make the resemblance perfect."

He caught a spray as it floated by and handed it to her, and she smiled and blushed, and laid it dripping among the coils of her hair. A wild, poetic beauty was in her face; all trace of the 'young lady' had disappeared; her womanhood was uppermost now. She was like some dark-eyed sea-queen, daughter of the twilight; some mystic, imaginary figure, with all the loveliness of ocean and of evening in her eyes.

Once past the current that swept round the head-land on which stood the lonely ruins of Upton Castle, Harry slackened speed, and, after a time, he let the boat drift out to sea with the wind, which was blowing off shore.

He felt that this would be one of the memorable days of his life, one of the few moments of almost unearthly joy that come, he believed, as pledges of a possible Paradise realisable even in this bewildered world, when self-tormenting mortals shall at last have groped their way thither through the error, and the suffering, and the wrongs of weary ages.

"I said that I was going to speak openly to you to-day," Harry began; "and I feel that anything else would be ludicrous, and even unfair to you and to myself. This is no time for hesitation; our whole lives are at stake, and I *must* speak out."

Viola did not look startled—nothing would have startled her to-night; she was in a waking dream.

"When you came down to the beach this evening, I knew that you were very miserable. It was a desperate impulse that made you long to be afloat on the waters; and with it lurked a secret hope—secret from yourself—that they would swallow you and your troubles for ever!"

She flinched from his earnest gaze, and coloured, while a look of pain came into her face.

"I do not say this in detection or reproach, but in sympathy," Harry went on hastily. "I know that you are being

driven to despair, and it is no wonder such thoughts come to you."

"I know it is very wrong——" Viola began.

"The Devil has been quoting Scripture to you—you must resist this marriage."

"It is too late, and besides——"

"It is not too late, and there is no 'besides,'" cried Harry.

"My father and my mother——"

Harry gave a fierce gesture and exclamation. "Do they not know that the slave-trade is illegal in England?"

"I don't understand—I——"

"No; you are brought up not to understand; the thing couldn't be done otherwise. O Viola, let me save you; there is nothing I would shrink from doing, there is nothing that you should shrink from doing. If you only realised——"

"What am I to do?"

"Ask him to release you."

"I have done so."

"And he refuses?"

"Yes."

Harry was silent for a moment. "You have not the courage to go to your father and say that you will not be forced into this marriage."

"I could face my father, but not the consequences for my mother. He punishes her for my misdeeds."

Harry set his lips.

"How securely they bind you through your own pity and tenderness! It is quite masterly. Loyala himself had not a more subtle method of playing the potter with human nature."

"My mother thinks it impossible for me to draw back now," said Viola. "I told her about the beating of the horse."

"Strange beings these good women are!" he exclaimed. "We shall never get any help from them—*that* is certain! O Viola! it is unendurable! I, who love you so that literally my whole soul is bound up in you,—not simply my happiness, but my whole being,—I would rather that you should die than marry that man!"

Even this absolutely unexpected announcement, made as it was with almost startling passion, did not appear very greatly to surprise Viola. Perhaps in her distraught state, exhausted physically and mentally by the emotions she had gone through she scarcely understood what was said, or, if she did, was unable to grasp its relation to the facts of her previous life, whose thread seemed to have slipped from her fingers when she left the land behind her.

"I have told you that I am ready to do anything in my power to save you; but without your assistance I am helpless. Will you come with me now, or perhaps to-morrow, to my friend Mrs. Lincoln?" Viola started. "Ah! you have

been prejudiced against her, I see; but I know she could advise and help us both as no one else could. She will sympathise deeply with you, for her marriage was arranged very much as yours has been arranged; her inexperience, her respect for duty, and her fear of giving pain were played upon, as yours are being played upon. She could speak to you more eloquently than I about the miseries of such a marriage; for she has suffered them. Already she knows about you, and I may say almost she loves you, and she is most eager to see and help you in your present troubles. I cannot tell you how generous and lovable she is—I should like you to find out for yourself. Dear Viola, will you let me take you to her?"

"Oh, no, no," she said in a strange, dreamy tone, almost as if the answer were automatic. "My mother and my aunt tell me that one must not know her."

Harry sighed. "But couldn't you judge for yourself, for once?" he urged. "Mrs. Lincoln has done what most people think wrong, no doubt; but most people are doing with the utmost self-congratulation what Mrs. Lincoln on her side thinks base and degrading. There are different ideas of right and wrong in the world, you must remember!"

"There can surely be only one right and one wrong," said Viola. Her mother's teaching was doing its work thoroughly at the critical moment.

"If you won't go to her then, will you let her come to you? Not at your home, of course, but at some appointed place outside."

"That would be deceiving my parents," said Viola. "I could not do that."

"And what resource do they leave you but deception?" he asked hotly. "You and they are not no equal terms: they can coerce you; their power over you is despotic. And to resist such power, all methods are justifiable."

"Oh! you cannot mean what you say! I have always been taught that the will of parents is sacred, and that no blessing can come to a child who acts in opposition to their wishes."

"Taught by whom?" Harry enquired. "By your parents?"

"Everyone would say the same thing," Viola replied.

"Everyone has been taught by parents," retorted Harry.

"Oh! take me home, take me home!" she cried suddenly. "It is wicked to listen to such things."

"Ah, do stay with me a little longer!" he pleaded. "Such moments as these come but once in a lifetime, and besides, even at the risk of your displeasure, I must speak plainly on a matter of such deep moment to us both. You seem to forget that I love you, Viola. Have I no hope of winning your love in return?"

She looked disturbed and bewildered, as if her notions of

right and wrong, in spite of her teaching, were becoming confused.

"Anyhow, I mean to try with all my might and main to win it," Harry continued; "nothing can daunt me, and I shall never despair. The strength and depth of my own feeling justify my obstinacy in hoping."

"Oh! take me home, I will not listen!"

"Is that fair to me?" Harry asked eagerly. "Why will you not listen? Because you fear my pleading might move you? O, Viola, if that is so, you have no right to forbid it; for your heart is half won!"

"It is not half won, it is not half won!" she protested. "Why are you talking like this and making me feel so wicked? What would my mother say to it? It must be horribly wrong, for I dare not face the thought of what she would say! Mr. Lancaster, please take me home."

"Only tell me that I have some hope—just a faint gleam."

"Take me home," she repeated.

Slowly, regretfully, he turned the boat's head and rowed back towards the shore. He saw that to say any more just now would be to injure his cause; Viola was becoming frightened of her own feelings.

The return journey—how different from the exultant half hour when they were outward bound!—was made almost in silence. As they touched the shore Viola sprang out so eagerly that she almost fell. Harry's arm was only just in time to save her.

"Let this be symbolical," he said, retaining the hand, which she gave him. "Farewell, and remember that you can always appeal to me for help, and never be afraid that I shall misinterpret your appeal if you make it. My advice to you is, to announce firmly and simply that you will not carry out your engagement, since, to all intents and purposes, it was forced upon you. In any case, do let me know how things go on, and remember that I am entirely at your command—always." He raised her hand and kissed it.

"You are too good to me," she said; "and I am very, very miserable. Thank you, and good-bye!" Her voice broke.

She drew her hand from his and hurried away. He would have followed, but she waved him back, quickening her pace, and presently vanished behind the first small headland.

Harry stood gazing at the spot where she had disappeared, till a voice behind him made him start round.

"Love," said the philosopher," is a temporary madness. Under its influence the human being——"

"Oh! what do you know about it?" cried Harry, ferociously.

"Ah! a bad paroxysm," remarked Caleb, "very lowering to the general tone, and apt to disturb the intellectual balance if long persisted in!"

"I abominate intellectual balance," said Harry, irascibly.

"Naturally, naturally," returned the philosopher. "My young friend, if energetic movement relieves your feelings, do let me walk rapidly up and down the beach with you; I have time at my disposal."

"Oh, hang you!" Harry exclaimed, "can't you leave a fellow alone?"

"*Very* disturbing to the intellectual balance," murmured Caleb.

"Perhaps *you* never had the heavens falling about your ears—the sun darkened and the moon put out?"

"On my recovery from a severe illness on one occasion——"

"Oh, this is more than I can bear!" Harry exclaimed, "I had far better pour out my woes to the stony rocks!"

"I assure you I deeply feel for you," said Caleb.

"Yes, because of the disturbance of my intellectual balance," retorted Harry, with a snort. "Caleb, you are the most rediculous man I ever met; you know everything and understand nothing; all is revealed to you, and you are blind as a bat. Free as air, you never move beyond the radius of a five-foot tether, and in the midst of life you are in death. Good-bye, and pray fervently for the disturbance of your intellectual balance."

With this parting advice, Harry strode off and left the philosopher chuckling.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ENCOUNTER.

"AND so Miss Sedley's wedding is fixed for the seventh," said Adrienne, cheerfully unconscious that she was inflicting torture upon the being for whom she would willingly have sacrificed happiness. "I do hope the marriage will prove a success."

"That we shall never know," observed Dick Evans. "Marriages are always made to *look* well outside."

"Yes, unless one of the couple drinks," said Adrienne, "and even then it doesn't often come out till they give a garden party."

(This allusion to a recent scandal was received with smiles.)

"For my part," Adrienne continued, "I think Philip Dendraith has misconceived his vocation. He ought to have gone on taking ladies in to dinner all his life; I would choose him out of a multitude for that office: but for marrying——!"

She shook her dainty little head expressively.

"Young men always settle down after they are married,"

said Mrs. Dixie; "I am sure he is a most agreeable young fellow."

"I'm glad it's not one of the girls," Dick Evans said, recklessly disregarding the fact of their large numbers and limited opportunities, "and I am glad not to have to congratulate *your* sister, Harry."

"Thank you," said Harry curtly.

"They seem to be hurrying it on," Dick continued; "the seventh—scarcely three weeks from now."

"I wonder how her *trousseau* can be got ready," said Mrs. Dixie. "I know that mine took six months to prepare; but then of course I had four dozen of everything, and the most exquisite work, and all real lace—I was one mass of insertion (Valenciennes)—my poor mother *would* have everything of the best, and——"

It suddenly struck Mrs. Dixie that she was committing an impropriety in alluding to underclothing in a mixed company, and she relapsed into a decorous but unexplained silence, preluded by a little cough which would have amply atoned for the grossest of improprieties.

Dorothy Evans, Dick's scapegrace sister, also took a hostile view of the marriage.

Philip's good looks and fascinating manner had not succeeded in blinding the girl's instinct for what is straightforward and genuinely chivalrous in man.

"He's all talk and bows," said Dorothy, "and you always feel he is laughing at you to himself, though you would think, to hear him, that you were the loveliest and the most fascinating of your sex. He is a horrid man, and I hate his eyes."

Dorothy had hit upon the one traitorous feature in his face. Perhaps no such man ever had eyes entirely trustworthy. Not that Philip's had the proverbial difficulty of looking one in the face; he could stare most people out of countenance; but his native subtlety and the coldness which lay at the root of his character revealed themselves unmistakably in his glance.

Harry had received the news without betraying himself, but it was more than he could endure to stay and hear it talked over. The discussion was in full swing when he left the room, quietly whistling an air from a comic opera.

He ruefully admired his own acting, though it struck him how very easy it was to deceive the people who think they know you best. He set off at once for the Manor-House, determining, rashly enough, to make an attempt to see Viola.

He thought that probably a violent reaction had set in after the heretical teaching of that afternoon on the water; that in the exaltation of repentance and the return to duty she had cut off her own possible retreat by at once fixing the day for her marriage. It was an act of atonement. Probably, how-

ever, a second reaction had taken place since then, and upon this Harry built his hopes.

Having searched the garden in vain, there was nothing for it but to go to the house and ask for Mrs. Sedley in the usual way.

Mrs. Sedley appeared and entertained her visitor solemnly in the drawing-room among the "lost souls" and the grand piano.

Harry thought he had never, in his life, found conversation so difficult. His mind became a blank every time he looked at the dull, grey face of his hostess, whose voice alone was sufficient to check the imagination of a Shelley.

"Is—is your daughter at home?" he asked at length, feeling, if not looking, very guilty.

"Yes, she is at home, but she has a headache! Of course we are all very busy preparing for the wedding."

"Naturally—I am sorry she has a headache."

"Thank you; I have no doubt it will not last very long."

"I suppose I—may I see her?" asked Harry, with sudden boldness.

Mrs. Sedley looked rather surprised, but she said, "Certainly," and led the way to her own sitting-room, where Viola, in the cold northern light, among colourless cushions, was lying upon a severe-looking sofa. It seemed symbolical of her life.

She sprang up to greet the visitor, whose presence appeared greatly to astonish her. She was pale and thin. The same constrained conversation went on as before, until the advent of tea afforded a merciful relief to the inventive powers of the unhappy trio.

Harry was at his wit's end, yet determined to make some attempt towards the attainment of his object, though he had to prolong his call till the curfew hour. A diversion, he hoped, might sooner or later occur, though Mrs. Sedley sat there with a polite and patient air of waiting till he should go that was most disconcerting. She looked, as usual, uncomplaining, but very suffering. Harry, however, was resolved. He went to the window on the pretext of looking at the view, and to his joy, he saw Geoffrey crossing the lawn. He at once shouted to him.

"Holloa! you here?" said Geoffry, changing his direction. "Don't know if the mother will let me in with my dirty boots. Well, Ila, how's the headache? Look here!" and he held up a trout by the tail.

"Eight-pounder!—there you are, mother; I lay it at your feet. I say, Harry, you might take the other two to *your* mother, with my compliments."

"Thanks; she will be delighted."

Mrs. Sedley brightened a little as if expecting that he would take the trout and go; but on the contrary, he established himself solidly in an easy chair-and engaged in a dialogue with

Geoffry upon the subject of fishing, which contained a vital principle so vigorous as to promise for it little short of immortality. Mrs. Sedley sighed. She had a great deal to do, and very little time to do it in; Harry knew that, and glued himself more firmly to his seat. He had propounded a theory about flies that Geoffry would not hear of for a moment; and as Harry stuck to it obstinately, a long argument was the result. As Geoffry said, it was distressing to see a sensible fellow making a fool of himself.

At last Mrs. Sedley rose. "Would Mr. Lancaster kindly excuse her? she had some important letters——"

Harry sprang up, indescribably polite. Mrs. Sedley must not for a moment think of letting him detain her. In the cause of science, he felt it his duty to root out a common error from Geoffry's usually clear mind, but——

This created a clamour; and in the midst of it, Mrs. Sedley retired. After that, Geoffry found his opponent singularly improved in mental grasp. His arguments grew milder; and before long, he was brought to confess that he saw and retracted his error.

Geoffry then became restless, as he usually did between four walls, and proposed to go out. Won't Harry come too?

But Harry's politeness would not allow him to desert Viola.

"Oh, she won't mind," said Geoffry.

In spite of her assent, however, he could not bring himself to commit this breach of manners.

"Well, then, you'd better stay and entertain her while I go and have a wash and brush up. I feel more picturesque than beautiful, more beautiful than clean!" and he went off by the open window.

Harry watched him out of sight. Then he turned rapidly, glanced at the door, and went over to where Viola was sitting. He took her hand in his, and said quietly:

"Viola, you have finally consented to this marriage in a fit of self-sacrificing ardour, and you are even now frightened of your deed. I have come to tell you again that you are wrong, and that you are doing what you will repent all your life. I have also come to tell you once more that I love you with all my heart and soul, and that I want you to promise to let me take you away from here to-morrow. If the pressure upon you is irresistible, as it seems to be, you must take my name—don't start—take my name so that you cannot take his. You will return to your home. or do whatever else you please, without feeling that I have in any way or at any time a claim on you. I know that my proposal would receive hard names from most experienced people, but I regard all things as of less importance than your salvation. Wait one minute—let me speak—we may be interrupted at any moment. I must not disguise from you that there is some risk in this plan. It would create a scandal; your good name might be attacked. But, darling, is that

worth considering in comparison with what is proposed for you—the one mere talk of silly people, the other——"

She winced and turned away with a gesture of passionate despair.

"I can't balance things; I am bewildered and terrified."

"Upon my soul, I believe mine is the only way to save you!" he exclaimed. "I entreat, I beseech, you to consent to it."

"Oh, it is impossible—it is so deceitful, and how could I accept such a sacrifice?"

"To have saved you would be my reward. I have thought it all out; this is no hasty idea of mine, Viola. Have pity on yourself and me. If you had consented to take refuge with Mrs. Lincoln, it might have been managed without this more serious step, from which you shrink; but since you will not—What's that?"

Viola gave a little half-suppressed cry; for at the open window, with his hand playing with the tassel of the blind, stood Philip Dendraith, blandly smiling. When he smiled so, Viola always felt a nameless terror.

"I hope I do not intrude," he said, advancing into the room with slow, firm footsteps, as if he were enjoying something leisurely.

"Viola, my love, I am sorry to hear you are not well to-day." He went up and kissed her on the mouth with an air of familiarity.

Harry set his lips.

"You must excuse these little demonstrations," said Philip, with a wave of his hand. "We haven't met for a whole day, you know."

"Pray don't apologise to me," said Harry, keeping guard over his voice. "Any apology you might think necessary would be due to Miss Sedley."

Philip glanced at him keenly out of the corner of his eyes and gave a cold smile.

"I do hope I wasn't interrupting something interesting," he said. "I know what you can be at your best—quite a Sheridan, upon my honour!"

"Shall I go on for your benefit?" said Harry, looking at his rival with steady eyes.

"Pray do," urged Philip, while Viola gave a frightened gesture. "Kindly allow me to find a comfortable chair first, that I may the more enjoy the treat in store for me. So—this is most luxurious. I didn't know your mother would have tolerated such a lounge in her house, Viola—*une chaise de Sybarite!*"

He leant back luxuriously, moving a little closer to Viola, so that he could lay his hand on the arm of her chair or touch hers now and again when it so pleased him.

From such a man it would be impossible to conceal that something of a secret nature had been taking place when he entered; Viola's cry of dismay had betrayed them.

Seeing how matters stood and knowing what sort of enemy he had to deal with, Harry took a characteristic resolution.

"Your suspicions are just," he said. "You did surprise a conversation between Miss Sedley and myself which we did not wish to be overheard."

"*Candide*," murmured Philip, taking that work from the book-shelves and turning over the leaves carelessly. "There is an interesting proverb of George Herbert's which you may perhaps be familiar with:—'When the tree is fallen all go with their hatchet.'"

"Not yet is the tree fallen," said Harry. "But I think it is better that it should fall. You must know that I have become acquainted with all the circumstances of your engagement."

Philip bowed. "Your interest in our affairs is most flattering."

"I will not mince matters," Harry continued; "I know that Miss Sedley is being forced into the marriage,"—Philip looked round,—"that you have taken advantage of her helpless position in the hands of parents who are willing to sell her to you—that's the long and short of it—in order to extricate themselves from their financial difficulties."

Viola started up. "I cannot hear such things," she cried.

"I beg your pardon," said Harry. "I was wrong—forgive me; but I am at liberty to say that Mr. Dendraith is to all intents and purposes intending to marry you against your will, that you have asked him to release you, and that he refuses. I consider myself also at liberty strenuously to advise you to refuse to carry out your engagement and to dare everything rather than fulfil it."

"There is an audacity about you," said Philip, looking up at him from his reclining attitude, "that really carries one away. A degree less audacity—were it but a hair's-breadth—and one would not tolerate you for a moment. I hope you are going to increase the dramatic effect by telling me that you have been proposing to Miss Sedley to elope with you. By the way, here is another proverb I might appropriately cite: 'Where there is no honour there is no grief.'"

Harry flushed deeply.

"As I hold it quite unjustifiable to marry a woman who is not really free to refuse you, I hold it justifiable to rescue her by any means in one's power. She is not to be sacrificed to an artificial code of honour."

"Rather more morality than honour about that view, methinks," said Philip. "Do you know, sir, that some men in my place would treat you in a manner that might be somewhat compromising to your dignity."

"It matters not to me what some men in your place might attempt," said Harry; "I have to deal with *you*, and I am quite prepared to do so in any manner that may seem necessary."

"Perhaps we had better continue our little chat outside," suggested Philip, rising. "It is useless to trouble Miss Sedley with these trifles."

"Certainly, but I have very little more to say. It is well, perhaps, that you should know that it is my design to oppose your marriage, and that I consider I have the right to do so by every means in my power."

"The lady to the victor," remarked Philip coolly as he led the way to the garden.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN VAIN.

To the consternation of every one, and the indignation of Mr. Sedley, Viola fell ill. The doctor said her nerves were unstrung, and that she must see nobody who might excite her, for at least a week. He regretted to have to be so barbarous, but Mr. Dendraith must certainly not be admitted.

Mr. Dendraith consigned the doctor to perdition, and tried to prevail upon Mrs. Sedley to allow him to see Viola notwithstanding. Little did he know that meek and mild lady. She was immovable. He began to fear that the marriage would be put off, in which case Harry Lancaster might give trouble, though Philip trusted to his own powerful influence and to that of Viola's conscience to overcome all opposition.

The doctor said the invalid only needed a little treatment, combined with perfect quiet, and there was no reason to postpone the marriage, though a very long and fatiguing wedding tour was not to be advised.

On the whole, perhaps Viola's illness proved a safeguard for Philip, as Harry was unable to have any communication with her, and the appointed day was drawing always nearer.

The prescribed week of quiet spread into ten days, and these to a fortnight—terrible days both for Viola and for Harry. Nor was Mrs. Sedley much happier. Anxious as only she knew how to be, she spent her strength in praying for an impossible faith, and found her only relief in a severe self-blame that she had it not without praying for.

As for Viola she did not know whether to wish these dragging days longer or shorter.

At nightfall, relief that the strain of the day was over, and terror at the thought that another had passed, fought a pitched battle, which went on till exhaustion drew her into a restless sleep. There were times when she was cruelly tempted to write to Harry, and tell him she was ready to adopt his plan; but the thought was thrust aside as inconceivably

wicked. She was ashamed to tell her mother how hard she found it to do her duty. She would fall on her knees at night before the open window, and pray with all the passion of her soul for strength and guidance—pray that she might forget the words that Harry had spoken to her out on the sea, words which echoed in her brain and haunted her with their subtle and tempting sophistry.

And now the house began to fill. Large numbers of rejoicing aunts and cousins and gleeful old friends came crowding in for the happy event, (as they would insist on calling it). Upton Court opened its disused chambers for the joyful members of the Dendraith connexion, who were so pleased that dear Philip was going to settle down and become a sedate and respectable married man after his wild career in early life.

Viola was now convalescent, and very busy helping her mother to entertain their guests.

Once Harry had written to her, saying that up to the very last moment he was always there ready and eager to carry out his proposed plan, if only she would make an appointment; but Viola wrote back entreating him not to write to her—her mother would wonder about the letter, and it could do no good. She thanked him warmly for his desire to befriend her, and said that she would never cease to remember his kindness. She took this opportunity of wishing him all good wishes, and remained his "very gratefully, Viola."

He called after this, and found her in the drawing-room, among a roomful of people, pouring out tea. He fancied there was a new dignity in her manner—born, thought the onlookers, of the honours of coming wifehood; really called forth, as Harry sadly divined, by the stimulus of great suffering.

Once or twice he caught her glance, and made another mute appeal; but she shook her head sadly, and turned away, and the miserable game went on.

Two days before the wedding there was a dance at the Manor-House, to which all the country-side was invited.

Philip expressed a desire that Viola should dance with no one but himself that night, unless she first asked his permission. It seemed to her to be taking airs of possession rather soon; but she said nothing, being too sick at heart, and too accustomed to follow her mother's ideal of womanly submission, to offer any resistance. Her recent illness would make a good excuse for refusing.

The drawing-room was roused out of its long doze; the lost souls, to their great amazement, had their glass cases taken off, and candles stuck into them; the silken chairs were revealed in all their faded glory, and placed round the walls to make space for the dancers. The dim old room was unrecognisable.

The dancing went merrily, thanks to Mr. Sedley's undeniable social talents and to Sir Philip's energy. Mrs. Sedley was

unable to depress her guests, though she did her unconscious best in that direction.

A boisterous country-dance was just over; the couples were hurrying into the hall, leaving only Lady Dendraith in a stiff-backed chair, with her chubby hands crossed on her lap, and her head drooping on her breast. According to established habit, the old lady was taking the opportunity for a quiet doze. Her son was out of the room, and there was nothing to keep her awake.

Viola, who had not been dancing, remained behind when the crowd passed out, hoping for a little rest and quiet.

Her white dress, soft and flowing, was very becoming to her. Philip had told her so to-night, and several others, not perhaps quite so competent to judge.

She had a bunch of white roses in her hair and at her breast; and on her neck a small diamond crescent sparkled.

Thinking she was alone except for the sleeping Lady Dendraith, she had leant her tired head back upon the red cushions of the sofa, and raised her hands to her forehead, covering for a moment her eyes.

When she removed her hands, Harry Lancaster was standing looking down upon her.

She started up.

"Oh, why do you come to me? It is not kind: you weaken me: for pity's sake, go."

"Do you grudge me these farewell moments—I who love you so?"

"Hush, it is wicked!"

"That I don't for a moment believe: the real wickedness is that——"

"You are mad!" she exclaimed. "We shall be overheard."

"Who can overhear?" he asked, lowering his voice. "Lady Dendraith is asleep."

"Her son would hear you if you were ten miles away."

"Viola," said a voice, at which she started, trembling violently, "I've been seeking you everywhere."

"Except here, apparently," said Harry.

Philip looked his enemy up and down, and down and up, and then passed him by without comment. The whole thing was done with such quiet and exquisite insolence that Harry coloured to his temples, and Viola breathed quickly.

With a sudden impulse he bent towards her.

"Will you give me this next dance?" he asked. He had chosen his time well.

Philip took a step forward: "Miss Sedley is engaged to me for it!"

"No," said Viola, with sudden spirit, "I did not promise it to you!" and she rose and laid her hand on Harry's arm.

Philip's shrug of the shoulders and smile were not pleasant as the two went off together. He had hidden his amazement

and anger as he hid, or could hide, almost any emotion, however violent.

But not for a moment did he lose sight of the couple as they whirled together among the dancers. He thought that Viola danced with more appearance of pleasure than she had danced before that evening, though previously *he* had been her partner. When had she vouchsafed to him such looks and tones? Her face to his jealous eyes seemed softened and glorified. Never before had her imprisoned beauty made so triumphant an escape.

Could it be possible that some other man had succeeded in quickening the throbs of that steadily beating heart, when he, Philip, had failed? It seemed incredible, yet Viola's coldness towards himself required some explanation.

When the dance was over, and the couple left the ball-room, Philip rose and followed them at a distance. He was too prudent to openly display his jealousy, too jealous to let them out of his sight. A crowd in the doorway, however, prevented him from leaving the room for a few seconds, and when he reached the hall the rebellious pair were nowhere to be seen. They had been tempted by the brilliant starlight onto the terrace, where the gentlest and mildest of night airs was moving now and again a breathless leaf, murmuring here and there among the ivy. The great avenue looked very solemn and dark under the stars; the vast old trees showing against the sky, like silent sphinxes full of a secret knowledge never to be revealed. The human element was absent; the heart ached with the penetrating coldness of that awful omniscience, wherein there was no love and no pity.

From the open windows of the ball-room stole presently the sad sweet notes of a waltz; *that* was the missing human note, full of longing and of sadness, of melancholy almost rising to despair.

The music seemed to rush forth, flood-like, assailing as a sea in tumult the fastness of that all-knowing silence. It was like the human heart, revolting against its narrow destiny, yearning unceasingly towards the larger, the lovelier, and the better, which haunt it forever, like the refrain of a sweet song, heard and half forgotten in by-gone days.

"Heaven help us!" exclaimed Harry, after another vain effort to persuade Viola to consent to his plan. "What were we sent for into this vast blind machine of a world, that goes grinding on century after century, and with it grinding human nerves and hearts to powder? What fiend was it that invented consciousness, that made torturable nerves, and hearts that are mere insignificant atoms of the universe, and yet capable, each poor atom, of such infinite woe? Surely we must be a mistake, an unlucky accident, that occurred during the chemical experiments of some meddlesome God, and which he has not taken the trouble to rectify or expunge."

"I fear it is very wrong," said Viola with a deep sigh;

"but I have wondered myself, of late, why we were given such power to feel pain, and at the same time placed in a world where duty always seems to lead to it."

"Yes, and *not-duty* too," said Harry. "You can't dodge it, try as you will. I think the world is divided between people who are dull and don't live at all—people who call themselves happy, but don't know what the word means—and those who suffer mortal anguish, but who *might* know the joys of Paradise here on earth, whose life is turned into a fiery torrent, which scorches instead of warming. That troublesome young God had a magnificent idea when he thought of us; but he failed in the execution, and the result is a wreck and ruin as terrific as the creation might have been splendid. We are brothers of the gods, but we are broken into a thousand fragments."

"Perhaps some day we shall be able to glue ourselves together again," said Viola, with a sad little smile.

"We want the glue," he returned, "and that glue is happiness and love, the two things that good people and bad alike deny us. The world resists its own salvation!"

Viola was silent.

"Duty is better than happiness," she said presently; "and better than love."

"Yet St. Augustine said: 'Love, and do what you will!' What else have we to save us from the loneliness of life, what else can protect us from its awful coldness and silence?"

He gave a movement towards the dark still avenue, and the glittering mystery of the heavens.

"The more clearly one realises how we stand in this wilderness of a universe, the more one feels the need of close fellowship and love. It is not so much immortality as the eternity of love that our hearts imperiously demand. Now you see why I am so persistent, why I allow nothing to overcome me till hope is absolutely lost. We can piece together some of our broken fragments, Viola; and I feel that you could and would love me if only I had a fair chance to make you understand your own latent self!"

She trembled and turned away.

"If I am right, consider what you are doing in turning from me; to what outer darkness you condemn yourself (putting me out of the question)."

"If my life proves unbearable, perhaps I shall die. God can't let one live and suffer always!"

"I don't remember many cases in which 'God' has shown himself so considerate," said Harry bitterly.

"Oh, don't say such things, I implore you!" she cried.

"You are buoying yourself up with false ideas, false hopes, false pieties, forgive me for saying so; but they are false, because they flatly and openly contradict the facts of life; and in so far they war against truth, which is our one hope."

"I can't argue with you. You confuse my ideas. I can

only cling to what I have been taught, and try to do my duty accordingly. What else is possible to me? *You* may be able to do right in your own way,—I don't know,—but how can I?"

It was said so pathetically that Harry impulsively put out his arms, and folded them round her with protective tenderness.

"Viola! Viola! it wrings my heart to see you fluttering like this in the meshes of a worn-out, lifeless old error. It is as if you were drowning in some deep sea, dragged down and smothered by a mass of tangled weeds, which you would not let me pull away. Some day you will see it all yourself; a rough, rude hand, instead of a gentle and loving one, will open your eyes, and then how bitter will be your regret, with no human being to comfort or to help you——"

"Except an insignificant creature called a husband," observed a cool, polite voice through the darkness. "He, however, having not yet assumed that extinguishing title, ventures to claim the fulfilment of a promise to dance the next waltz with him—if it is not asking too much. Perhaps the fact of being a husband minus only two days depreciates him in anticipation."

Viola laid her hand in his proffered arm, murmuring something about not knowing the dance had begun.

"Pray don't apologize," said Philip: "it is for me to apologize for my tactless intrusion."

They walked up the terrace together in silence.

At the end Philip paused, leaning against one of the stone pillars of the terrace. "You seem to find Mr. Lancaster's conversation spiritually nourishing," he remarked.

Viola looked up, but made no reply.

"He is a very interesting young man," said Philip.

Again no answer, only a steady gaze.

"His only fault is an unfortunate prejudice against myself; and as my experience somewhat confirms his opinion, I have of course but few objections to make to it."

A pause.

"I pride myself upon my tolerant spirit," Philip continued urbanely. "I consider it uncouth to be intolerant, or even fractious. I don't dissipate my forces in guerilla warfare."

In his insolent attitude, with his arm upon the pillar of the parapet, he looked down at his companion steadily, telling off his sentences one by one, and leaving a pause between each, so that they seemed to fall like stones into silent water.

Viola's eyes at last sank before his, and a tremor passed through her.

"You are cold," said Philip. "Would you like to go in?"

"I am not cold."

He bent forward and drew her white shawl closer round her. She shrank under his touch.

"Why, you are shivering!" he cried. "It is dangerous to stay out here in your thin dress. I don't want to have you laid up again. Delays are dangerous, especially with such a

very interesting young man coasting round. Flowing moustaches and blue eyes, even in the absence of regular features, are not to be trusted. Don't imagine for a minute that I bear him any ill-will; I, in fact, sympathize heartily with his admiration for yourself."

He offered her his arm with a bland smile, and led her into the house.

"I think, by the way," he said, as they crossed the hall, "that I asked you not to dance with anybody but myself to-night. It is perhaps a little freak of mine, but do you mind gratifying it?"

"I am not anxious to dance any more to-night," said Viola; "I am too tired."

Philip laughed. "You are no diplomatist, my love," he said. "You might have pleased yourself and me at the same time had you been less uncompromisingly honest. How do you expect to govern your husband at that rate?"

"I don't expect it: my place is to obey."

"Yes, ostensibly; but you know there are circuitous routes as well as straight ones to the same spot. A wife can generally attain her object if she knows how to manage cleverly, and I shall be charmed to be managed cleverly, I assure you, and promise to keep one eye permanently shut, so that you will have no difficulty in finding my blind side."

She remained silent.

"On one or two points, I admit, I am apt to show my teeth; and I am afraid—such is the infirmity of human nature—that Mr. Lancaster might cause me to snarl if he is not careful. But once out of range of these few reefs, there is nothing to expect but smooth sailing. You see I have been weak enough to fall in love, and that makes me very manageable. I am waiting, pining to be managed! Two short days more to pass, and then, my love, you will come and manage me! What prospect could be sweeter?"

How did it happen that, after all this profession of submission on the part of her future husband, Viola left him that night with a more vivid sense of his dominating will than ever she had before?

CHAPTER XX.

A BAD BEGINNING.

GREAT anxiety prevailed at the Manor-House that the wedding day should prove fine. The bride alone did not share the anxiety, though she said "I hope so" without flagging when the guests expressed their feelings with regard to the desirable omen.

Lady Clevedon had come over the night before the wedding, with the intention of preventing Mrs. Sedley, as much as possible, from dwelling on the sadder aspects of the event. She brought with her Arabella, whose unremitting sprightliness might be expected to have a cheering effect.

But Arabella was only an accessory; Lady Clevedon discreetly chartered Geoffrey for her enlivening purpose, Geoffrey being the only person who had ever been known to make his mother laugh.

He reminded his aunt that this had been done at an enormous expenditure of vital force, by means of a terribly energetic imitation of an Irish reel, and only in the last wild paroxysm had his mother displayed the slightest amusement. Geoffrey appealed to Lady Clevedon's sense of propriety to convince her that the experiment could not be repeated in the present conditions.

"My dear boy, be as foolish as you know how; regard the occasion as a sort of carnival, and no one will say you nay!"

"A most cheering invitation," said Geoffrey, "but how is one to get up a carnival in a roomful of stuck-up wedding guests?"

"They are only stuck-up because they are not amused; go and amuse them."

Geoffrey gave a rueful whistle!

"Well, I call this simply cruelty to animals! What would you have me do? Go up to my mother with my hands in my pockets, and ask her how she feels to-morrow?"

"Graceless boy! To-morrow your mother will want all the consolation we can offer her."

"Well, that's the sort of thing I never *can* understand!" said Geoffrey, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Mothers bring up their daughters on purpose to get married, and then require more pocket-handkerchiefs than can be afforded by any family of moderate means, when the happy event comes off!"

"You have much to learn before you understand women and their ways, my dear," said the lady, with a laugh.

"Oh, I've watched 'em," said Geoffrey, "and it seems to

me very much like watching a lot of young tadpoles in a pond. You see them wriggling and scuttling about, but you can't for the life of you make out what they're doing it for; and it's my belief they don't know, themselves."

"Which, tadpoles or women?"

"Both, but of the two commend me to the tadpoles for method."

"You young heretic! Wait till you enter the woman's empire, and then tremble! Luckily we have our revenges! Ah! Viola, my dear, let me look at you; very nice, indeed. I'm glad to see the old lace again, and I hope you will wear it oftener than your mother did; I call it wasting good lace to save it. Ah! and the nice old Dendraith diamonds too. Harry, doesn't our bride look beautiful? It is good for a woman to be admired; it makes her admirable. Philip has worked wonders already."

Viola was trembling and colouring, either at the praise or at Lady Clevedon's appeal to her cousin to confirm it.

"And this is the bridegroom's gift, is it not? Very lovely and most becoming! Did I not tell you," Lady Clevedon added aside, "that hers was a face to improve? The change came about sooner and more startlingly than I expected."

"I think your niece is very lovely," said Harry, simply

Lady Clevedon at the moment darted off to the assistance of Mrs. Sedley, to whom social duties were always arduous, and Harry Lancaster approached the bride.

She stood with her hands clasped before her, not looking up. He saw that she was breathing quickly.

"I hope you won't be angry with me if I ask you to accept a small wedding gift?" he said in a not very steady voice. "It is a little antique knife I got in Italy, of little use; but I thought its chasing finely done. It is said to have belonged to the Colonna family; but it is now put to the peaceful purposes of a paper-knife or a mere ornament."

He handed her as he spoke an instrument of finely tempered steel, with an elaborate handle exquisitely chased.

"The blade is rusty; the man in the shop I bought it at assured me as a recommendation that the mark is really an old blood-stain. He looked ready to stick it into me when I laughed."

"How beautiful! and how good of you!" she said. "I shall value this very much."

She hesitated for a moment and then thrust it through the coils of her hair.

"How perfectly charming!" exclaimed the watchful Arabella, rapturously. "Really, of all your wedding presents I envy you this the most. There is something most fascinating about it! It looks as if it might have done many a secret deed of darkness before it was promoted to these gayer offices! I am sure it must have some sinister history. It makes you look quite dangerous, Miss Sedley, but *so* interest-

ing! Doesn't it, Mr. Lancaster? Quite a Lucrezia Borgia. We shall be hearing dreadful things of you, I am sure,—it will be quite kind of you to give a new sensation; do let it be something striking, won't you? Paper-knife or mere ornament as it is, I must confess I shouldn't like to have it raised against me! But it won't be me, I am sure; I never made anybody jealous—much more likely this Mrs. Lincoln, who is coming to live here and shock us all. Mr. Lancaster, you don't know what responsibility may rest on your shoulders; it is really a dangerousg ift—why, it would make one long to commit a murder for the mere pleasure of using it."

"It would really be a sin to waste it," said Geoffrey.

"Flying in the face of Providence," added Harry, "which has provided all things for our use."

"Now then, Viola my dear, we must be off," said Aunt Augusta. "Mrs. Courtenay, Mr. Lancaster, be good enough to go in the next carriage, and the bride and I will follow in the last."

In a moment the room was cleared, and the carriage drove off.

"What has become of that girl's shyness!" exclaimed Lady Clevedon, straining her eyes to catch the last glimpse of the white still figure of the bride, as she stood, bouquet in hand, upon the doorstep.

Harry made no reply, but the thought crossed his mind that great misery and great shyness were perhaps likely to counteract one another.

"I am so glad the day is so fine," said Lady Clevedon presently; "it will put them all in good spirits."

"Yes," Harry answered.

The weather was fine certainly, but it was not one of those languorous days of summer that suggest nothing but rest and peace.

The sunshine had indeed a singular brilliance, but there was a blusterous wind careering over the land, swaying the ripening corn, and making the trees rustle and complain of the rough treatment.

Overhead, too, the cloud masses had been scattered by the wild wind: no form had been left them; they were strewn in ragged streamers across the sky, gleaming with captured light.

But there was no suggestion of pain or passion in the aspect of the roughly handled clouds; rather a great joy in the infinite breadth of the heavens and the ecstasy of perfect freedom.

The grey old church, roused out of its habitual calm, was the centre of a scene of subdued excitement. Society in the village was stirred to its depths: only the bedridden remained at home to-day; the tiniest infants were rapt from their cradles and carried by eager mothers to the lych gate, where one by one the carriages drew up and the gay wedding-guests

alighted, sweeping or tripping or hurrying into the church, according to habit and character.

Lady Clevedon was among those who did her alighting deliberately, giving directions to the coachman in decisive tones, and then walking coolly along the paved pathway between the graves, to the grey old doorway in the ivy-covered tower.

This was the last arrival before the centre of all interest—the bride.

The old Manor-House coachman, with a backbone that any steeple might be proud of, whipped up his horses on entering the village, and the carriage dashed up to the lych gate amidst an amount of dust and flourish and prancing that made one or two of the younger children cry.

Mr. Sedley alighted first, and was greeted with a cheer; then came a cloud of something soft and white, like the foam of the breakers, whose moan even here, in the moment's excited pause that followed her appearance, the bride could just catch above the rustling of the wind.

There was a deafening shout, and then a shower of roses, honeysuckle, and cottage flowers fell at her feet.

Many a "God bless you!" "Long life and happiness to you!" followed her as she walked between the tombstones on her father's arm; while suddenly the old tower started into life, and sent out a peal of wedding-bells which was heard for miles along the quiet country,—those eternal wedding-bells ushering in the sorrows of the ceaseless generations! The sunshine was pouring down upon the pathway, but the wind seemed as if it would prevent the bride from entering the church, so angrily did it bluster round her, and press against her slight form as she bent forward to resist it.

As the wind among sea-foam, that western blast made her garments shiver and flutter together, as if in fear.

"She looks like a angel!" exclaimed one enthusiastic woman among the crowd, holding up her indifferent infant for a last look as the white figure disappeared through the church-door.

"They'll make a lovely pair!" asserted another admirer. "And don't the old gentleman look proud about it all!"

"The poor lady don't seem quite pleased, though; she's that white and thin, I'm thinking the poor thing's got something wrong with her liver. As I was a-saying to George only the other day"—and so on; the oracular remark made to George being to the effect that only a box of Parr's Life Pills stood between Mrs. Sedley and the grave.

Several people recalled memories of the wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Sedley at this very church: among them "old Willum." He however, with patient humility was ready at once to withdraw his reminiscences in favor of those of any person who might think his own superior. Several did so, and Willum faded quietly into obscurity.

There was a dim, wistful look in his eyes as they followed the young bride up the pathway to the church: only yesterday, it seemed, she had chattered to him in her childish way. taken him into her confidence about her tadpoles and her pets; or entreated him, with tears in her eyes, not to go on working in the rain. The lonely old man loved her faithfully, and his heart ached as he thought of the Manor-House henceforth without her.

Within the church, when the bells ceased, was a solemn hush. The wedding-guests were ranged along the church, looking like a set of gaily dressed and very properly disposed dolls.

At the altar stood the bridegroom.

"How distractingly handsome he looks!" exclaimed Arabella in a whisper to her neighbour. "If he weren't so nearly a married man I should really fall in love with him."

"You have still a few seconds to indulge in a transient passion," said Lady Clevedon contemptuously,

"Alas, he is already claimed!" cried Arabella with a sigh. "Look with what grace he greets the bride! It is charming! And those few sweet words that he whispers in her ear."

The bride's reply, had it been overheard, would have scandalized the spectators not a little.

"Please do not forget that I am here against my own wish, and can have no response in my heart for such speeches! And one thing more: Please do not forget that what I say to-day is said with my lips only!"

There was no time to answer, for the ceremony was about to begin. Philip had counted on the effect of the solemn service upon one of Viola's scrupulous temperament. He thought that she would feel the sacredness of the oaths she was taking, and that victory for him would be half won by the strokes of her own vigorous conscience. He was quite unprepared for her repudiation of the whole service, and this continued opposition, meek and quiet as it was, roused the very worst side of his character. His bride, he reflected, had got to learn the difference between a lover and a husband.

Over the altar was a stained glass window of mellow tinting, through which the sunshine streamed. Every colour and shade of colour was there, blending, softening, gleaming, growing deeper or paler with the changing light and the occasinal shadowing of a tree outside blown back and forwards by the wind. Viola was standing in the line of the sun's rays, and the colours stained her dress, passing across her in a broad band of radiance, and falling on the cold stone floor behind her and on the half-effaced brasses at her feet. Upon her bosom a deep blood-red stain glowed in fiery brilliance, like the symbol of some master passion in her heart—or, perhaps a death-wound! She stirred not until the time came when the hands of bride and bridegroom were joined, and

then she gave a slight, scarcely perceptible shiver, which, however, was not not lost upon Harry or upon Philip.

"*Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.*"

To the triumphant strains of the wedding-march, bride and bride-groom walked back along the aisle to their carriage.

Was it only Viola who heard in that wonderful outburst the ring of something infinitely sad and hopeless?

"You look cold, my love," said Philip, when he and his bride were on their way back to the Manor-House, the sound of the bells still pursuing them in noisy and rather foolish rejoicing.

"Can I put a shawl round you?"

"Oh! I am not cold, thanks," said Viola.

"Excitement a little too much for you, perhaps. Well, that will soon be over now. They can't amuse themselves at our expense much longer, let us be thankful. Soon I shall have you all to myself." He put his arm round her and was about to draw her closer, when his eye caught the glitter of the Sicilian ornament in her hair.

"What's this?" he asked. "Another wedding gift? Uncommon fine work, this—antique, and of the best Renaissance period. But what a murderous-looking thing to wear in your hair!"

"It is meant to be used for a paper-knife, or merely to be regarded as a curiosity," said Viola.

"It is a real work of art, there's no doubt of that. Who is the possessor of so much artistic——"

"Harry Lancaster gave it to me."

Philip looked round.

"Indeed! It is very obliging of Harry Lancaster; but I object to your receiving present from him, especially of this character. If one believed in omens, it might make one uncomfortable. You'll excuse me, but I must take possession of this sinister-looking hair-pin. I can't allow you to keep it."

Viola flushed up. "It was given to *me*, not to you," she said, "and I cannot surrender it."

"*Cannot* is not exactly the word to use to me, my dear."

"*Will* not, then," she said hastily.

Philip looked at her in astonishment. "I am unable to congratulate you on your wisdom, Viola. To begin your married life by deliberate opposition and disobedience is not the act of a sensible woman, but of a pettish child."

"I cannot part with my gift," Viola persisted.

"My dear, I have told you that I cannot allow you to keep it. What is to happen in such a case? You know quite well that Lancaster behaved in a way that is unforgivable. I consider that the conduct has been throughout ungentlemanly. We stand to one another in a hostile attitude. He did his utmost to supersede me in your affections; we meet on terms of enmity. Such being the case, I consider it a piece

of infernal cheek on his part to give you a present; and I must insist on your returning it at once."

"No, no, I cannot, I cannot!" she cried with rising excitement as Philip bent forward to take the object of dispute from her.

"Now, don't be foolish," he said; "can't you understand the situation and be reasonable? It is impossible for my wife, in existing circumstances, to wear the gift of Harry Lancaster.

"I won't wear it, then," said Viola. "Only don't take it away from me."

"You must give it back; there is no alternative: and if you won't, I must. Will you give it back?"

"I have already accepted it; I can't give it back."

"Then you leave me no choice."

She had the knife clasped in her right hand. Philip began gently enough but resolutely to open the fingers. Striving to close them again, she unclasped from her neck the diamond ornament, Philip's gift, with her free hand.

"Will you give back that dagger?"

"I would rather give back these," she answered, holding out the glittering trinket.

Philip's face darkened. "Infatuated woman! Do you want to ruin our chance of peace at the very outset?"

"I will obey you in all other things. I accepted this gift not as your wife, but as myself. I was not your wife then, in fact. Will you not leave me even a little remnant of individuality? Am I always to be your wife, never myself? I have not questioned your authority, but you ask for more than authority. You ask me to surrender my personality. The greatest despot only commands, he does not altogether extinguish, his subjects. You go too far even for a husband."

"You talk too much nonsense even for a wife," said Philip. "The world regards and criticises you now as my wife and nothing else. What else are you? You have no other standing or acknowledged existence. Therefore, naturally I have a deep interest in your conduct. I am sorry to have to begin our married life with a disagreement; but you really must understand from the outset, once for all, what our relations are to be. I desire nothing better than to be a kind and indulgent husband; but on such points as this, I can brook no dispute. Now, pray, let's have no more of it. Give me that bauble without further fuss. We are near home and must have no scenes."

But Viola's fingers only tightened their grasp as the carriage approached the avenue of the Manor-House.

"Very well then, I must use a little muscular persuasion; there is no time to lose!"

As he did so, Viola held the diamonds, which she had in her left hand, out of the window. "On this one point I too

am determined," she said: "if you take my gift I drop the necklace."

With a muttered oath, Philip relaxed his hold.

"Obstinate woman! You don't know when the last payment will be made for this!"

CHAPTER XXI.

UPTON CASTLE.

"Now, Marion, if you are not content you ought to be, and I will listen to no plaints. Viola writes regularly and cheerfully (her style is really rather stately and good); her husband appears to be kind to her, and I cannot see what you have left to make yourself miserable about."

"Oh! I am not miserable, Augusta; only anxious, a little anxious."

"Now pray, Marion, what for?" demanded Lady Clevedon brusquely. "Do you suppose that avalanches are lying in wait for your daughter, and precipices defying the laws of nature at every turn?"

Mrs. Sedley was silent. She did not dare to tell her sister-in-law that it was the very cheerfulness of Viola's letters that caused her anxiety. She could gather nothing from those clear, unemotional epistles, couched in language which had a certain quiet force, and vaguely suggested that the writer held many unsaid things in reserve.

"I must wait till she comes home," thought the mother, "and then I shall easily be able to judge."

The wedding-tour was now nearly over, and the happy pair were expected to arrive at their home at the end of the week.

Lady Dendraith drove over daily to Upton Castle, endeavouring to brighten up the tumbledown old place, and give it, as far as possible, a bridal appearance. Her task was indeed a hard one. Of all gloomy old houses that ever a well-intentioned mother attempted to make look bridal, surely Upton Castle was the most hopeless. The poor lady gazed at its gaunt rooms, and listened to the ceaseless moaning of the waves below its windows, in despair. Her one idea for effecting a bridal appearance was white satin; but after the introduction of an inordinate number of fire-screens, sofa-cushions, photograph-frames, album-covers, and other ornaments made of this festive material, the sole resource became exhausted, and still the shadows lingered gloomily in the corners, and hung like a canopy about the ceilings of the vast old rooms.

Lady Dendraith, sitting gazing at her unsuccessful distri-

bution of white satin in the great drawing-room,—her bonnet, from sheer perturbedness of spirit, edged to one side,—was a sight piteous to behold. The dreariness of the place, now in the throes of a thorough cleaning, was enough to discourage the most hopeful.

It seemed as if the effort to make the long-disused house once more a human habitation had disclosed a host of dismal secrets. After a lapse of nearly a hundred years, daylight streamed into musty rooms and corridors, where ancient spiders had established themselves in forgotten corners,—spiders with long pedigrees, and a goodly array of corpses to attest their title to distinction; and alas! these respectable creatures now found themselves suddenly swept away, by a democratic Turk's-head, and wondered irefully what things were coming to!

The care-taker of ten years' standing—a person of such intense and awful respectability that Lady Dendraith felt frightened of her—was tall and strangely thin, with a face tapering at each end to a nice point, a pair of small eyes, and a long, pale-yellow nose. Smooth, iron-grey hair, brushed down over her brow, and severely plaited at the back of the head, seemed a rebuke to all forms of frivolous hairdressing.

But if Mrs. Barber's appearance was awe-inspiring, her language was something that might turn one to stone. Poor Lady Dendraith felt like a lisping child in the presence of this living dictionary.

"Well, Mrs. Barber," she would say with humility on her arrival at the Castle, "how are you getting on?"

With a stately inclination of the head Mrs. Barber would reply: "I am gratified to be able to inform your Ladyship that the preparations are progressing with as much celebrity" (the good woman's copiousness and accuracy were not exactly on a par) "as the circumstances will admit!"

"Oh! I am glad of that; the time is getting short, you know, and we seem rather behindhand. You see, my son will bring home his young wife on Tuesday, and I am anxious to have everything looking nice and bright for their reception."

"I can enter into your Ladyship's sentiments," returned the august one with a stately bend of the head; "but as to the place looking *bright*, I don't anticipate that it is ever likely to do that. I have resided here now for ten years, and I cannot remember that I ever saw it look, as one might say, cheerful. Them waves"—Mrs. Barber did relax a little from the austerity of her language under stress of emotion—"them waves are that mournful, beating, day in, day out, against the cliff-side, that at times I do assure your Ladyship I have felt as if I must give a month's notice to go on the spot. At night, when the place is shut up, it's as still as a churchyard, barring the rats in the garret, which worrits about among the lumber like creatures taken leave of their senses. And the size of

'em! Your Ladyship wouldn't believe it!" said Mrs. Barber with much feeling, "but the tramp and scamper of them nasty beasts over my head is more like a man's footsteps than a vermin's."

"Dear me! Why don't you let the cat into the garret, Mrs. Barber?"

The bony form of the housekeeper turned straight round and faced her alarmed employer.

"Did I understand your Ladyship aright? Give my poor Maria to be worried by them great animals?"

"Oh! very well, Mrs. Barber," said Lady Dendraith meekly; "if your Maria is afraid of the rats ——"

"What cat *can* do, Maria for many years *'as* done," said Mrs. Barber, "and for no other family would she have done as much; I say it with respect." Giving a slight sniff as a delicate finish to her remarks, Mrs. Barber turned again, and led the way to the dining-room.

"Oh! this seems more forward," said Lady Dendraith; "but those old portraits look sadly gloomy, and I should much like to give them a little cleaning up, but Mr. Philip laughs at me. Still, for a young bride one feels that everything ought to be as cheering as possible."

When Lady Dendraith visited the drawing-room her heart sank.

It was enormously large and lofty; the light from the windows which faced on the sea and a bleak foreground of rocks, was powerless to drive the shadows from the farther end of the room, or to rise to the high ceiling. The furniture, of a vast and stately character, stood in severe symmetry along the walls; not a footstool remained unbalanced by a brother footstool staring at it from the opposite side of the vast fireplace, or from a corresponding sofa. It was difficult to imagine this gloomy saloon the kingdom of a young bride.

"Poor young thing; I wish the place had been a little less lonesome for her. I dare say she will be able to make a snug corner for herself out of the ante-drawing-room, though, do what it will, it looks unhomelike. I *did* think the red carpet and blue curtains would have cheered it up!"

In a somewhat depressed mood, Lady Dendraith returned to her own cosy home, leaving the housekeeper to her Maria and the redoubtable rats.

The eventful day proved wet. Before sunrise a mist lay across the sea, and crept inland, spreading over hill and valley, and soon obliterating every object of the landscape. It was to a world without form, a void, a blank, expressionless world, that the young wife was to be welcomed. Five months had passed since she left her home on that brilliant July morning, and the summer meantime had given place to the dreariness of a spiritless November.

As the sound of carriage-wheels at length announced the arrival of the expected travellers, the hall-door was thrown

open, and Mrs. Sedley stood revealed on the doorstep, her figure defined against the fireglow of the great hall behind. A little in her rear was Mrs. Barber and the portly butler, while on the stone ledge which flanked the flight of cold grey steps stood Maria, with tail erect and glittering eyes, in an attitude of excited expectancy.

The next moment the occupants of the carriage had mounted the steps, and the bride was folded in her mother's arms.

The embrace was long and silent. Philip then shook hands with Mrs. Sedley, cordially inquiring about her health, and thanking her for having come to welcome them.

"You see I have brought back your daughter safe and sound," he said, cheerfully. "She is rather pale to-night after all our journeyings, but I hope the rest will soon make her look like herself again. What a magnificent fire! None of *your* ordering, Mrs. Barber, I am sure. You know what sworn enemies you and I used to be in old times about your fires." ("It's my belief the respectable person's chilling appearance put them out," he added aside, with a laugh.) "Upon my word," he went on, looking round the shadowy hall, now filled with the fitful light of blazing logs, "the place looks really comfortable. What do you say, Viola?"

"Most comfortable," she assented.

Mrs. Sedley had led her to a large chair by the fire-place, removed her wraps, and made her warm her cold feet and hands before the blaze. Maria, all curiosity, was circling round mother and daughter, with curving back and agitated tail. Finally she rubbed herself against Viola's knee, and then jumped onto her lap.

"*Well!*" exclaimed the astonished Mrs. Barber in amazement; "I never see Maria do such a thing in her life before. I couldn't have believed it!"

With a gesture that was almost passionate, Viola had welcomed the animal and folded it in her arms. Her head was bent down for the instant, and when she raised her face again it was very white. Mrs. Sedley looked anxiously at her. What was the undefinable change that she saw in her daughter's manner and expression? A change too subtle to be described, yet distinct enough to make Mrs. Sedley feel more than doubtful whether she could now discover her daughter's frame of mind. Viola seemed to have wandered away to a great distance. There was something a little careless, a little indifferent, in the carriage of the head, in the voice and gestures; and it struck Mrs. Sedley that she took but a slight interest in her new home.

Mrs. Barber, who had secretly resented the idea of a mistress, came to the conclusion that she and the lady might get on well enough together if the lady were careful.

Mrs. Sedley, Mrs. Barber, and Maria presently conducted the newcomer to her bedroom—a vast, dim space over the

drawing-room, with the same large, unsuccessful windows, and the same symmetrical arrangement of Brobdignag furniture.

Below, a repast awaited the travellers; and Viola was exhorted to come down as soon as possible. as she looked worn out and must be hungry.

"Yes, hungry I am!" she said; "I feel at present as if food and rest ought to content any human being, and yet curiosity is not quite chased away." She drew aside the curtains as she spoke, and peered out into the night. "Pitch darkness!" she said with rather a singular intonation.

"The window looks out to the sea," remarked Mrs. Sedley, "but come, dearest; that you can admire at your leisure to-morrow."

An involuntary sigh escaped the young mistress of the house at the word "to-morrow;" but it was checked midway as she added with a smile: "Absurd curiosity indeed, since I shall have my whole lifetime in which to indulge it!"

Mother and daughter descended the stairs together, followed in a zigzag course by the singular and devoted cat. Viola took her up and placed her on her shoulder, entering the dining-room with the creature curling itself affectionately about her neck and face.

"I wish I were an artist!" exclaimed Philip, rising and coming over to his wife. "You have no idea what a charming picture you and Maria make."

An undefinable change of expression passed across her face, as she altered the admired attitude, taking the cat in her arms and folding her close against her breast.

"The credit of it rests with Maria," she said, moving away towards the fireplace.

The butler—a portly person like an overgrown Cupid—presently announced that the meal was on the table, and the three forthwith sat down in a rather constrained and uncomfortable manner to their repast. Their voices seemed to wake a thousand hollow whispers in the vast room, and had a strange, ominous sound mingling with the eternal boom of the waves. To Viola, it seemed as if each of the portraits was gazing at her in the cold, omniscient manner peculiar to those works of art. Everything about the place was weird, and hushed, and mysterious; there was something blood-chilling at times even about Maria, who had a way of appearing suddenly in unexpected places or springing without warning onto the back of one's chair.

"It's my belief that cat's bewitched," Philip said; "see the way she glares at me with her green eyes!"

"I read somewhere that green eyes are the truest of all eyes," said Viola.

"Perhaps that's why they are so rare," Philip observed. "Get away, you green-eyed monster. I know I shall dream

of you to-night; and that'll not be a night-mare exactly, but something worse."

"Well," said Mrs. Sedley, after some time had passed in desultory talk, "I think the best thing this tired child can do is to go to bed, and put off seeing her new domain till morning, when I hope the weather will have changed and everything be at its brightest and best. Then she will have to instal herself as mistress of the house, and make Mrs. Barber understand that she no longer has supreme authority!"

Philip laughed. "I expect the good Barber will grievously resent her dethronement, and we shall hear some majestic English on the head of it! I hope she won't take umbrage and go. She is honest as the day, and devoted to the family."

"She shall not go because of me, I promise you," said Viola, with something in her manner that was new to it. "It would be better I should go myself. I can perhaps equal her in honesty, but I cannot claim to have served the family for so many devoted years."

She spoke jestingly, and Philip laughed a little, but he glanced at her in a manner not exactly amused.

"Dearest," said Mrs. Sedley again, "you must really go to bed now, you are looking so tired."

Viola rose, and mother and daughter left the room together, Philip springing up to open the door for them. He returned to his place by the fire, with a changed expression. The polite cheerfulness and even gaiety of his demeanour during the evening suddenly fell from him like a mask. His brow clouded, and his thin lips set themselves in a hard, disagreeable line.

Much to her chagrin, Maria had been left behind in the dining-room, alone with her master. A faint "miaw" disturbed his sinister meditations. He looked up with a frown, saw the cat, and, following a quick savage impulse, he put out his foot and kicked her to the other side of the room, hearing, not without satisfaction, a dull thud as the creature struck against the panelling. Piteous cries followed, as Philip rose, lifted the cat in his arms, and, walking across the room, quietly put her outside the door. There on the hard stone floor, with her leg broken, the poor creature passed the night, and there she was found by her distracted mistress next morning, the animal trying, in her joy, to limp towards her as she heard the familiar footstep.

CHAPTER XXII.

EXILED.

MARIA'S broken leg was at once bound up, and she found herself in a position of even greater importance than usual.

Viola begged to have the wounded creature beside her in her sitting-room, where she could tend her and give her her food. This, and her evident concern for the animal, won the housekeeper's heart. No war was declared between the new mistress and her commander-in-chief. Mrs. Barber was even ready to indulge her well-conducted lady with a semblance of authority.

"If there is anything that you would like altered, ma'am," said the housekeeper, graciously, "I hope you won't hesitate to say so. Her ladyship arranged the furniture as she thought best, but of course you are quite at liberty to make any little changes as you might prefer; everybody has their own taste, which of course it's no blame to them, but only what is natural."

"I think I have no taste of my own," said Viola; "it seems to me impossible that any of the furniture could stand in any other position, and I do not wish it altered."

And from that moment it seemed as if a spell had been cast over the place, as over the palace of the Sleeping Beauty; not a chair or a table, or so much as a footstool, budged by a hair's breadth from its accustomed spot. Viola's decree had petrified the house in its present form, and there it remained, solemn, solid, and eternal. It seemed as if its dignity must confound even the thunders of the Day of Doom, and might be expected to live through that crisis, calm and undisturbed.

Mrs. Barber never ceased to marvel at Maria's strange accident.

"I left her with you and Mr. Philip in the dining-room, as safe and sound as she could be; and in the morning——! Perhaps she left the room with you and Mrs. Sedley," the housekeeper suggested.

Viola was never very explicit on this point. She could not, or would not, state whether the cat came out of the room or remained behind with Philip, and as Mrs. Barber had a wholesome dread of that polite gentleman, she dared not question him, as she longed to do. So the affair remained a mystery.

Mrs. Sedley had to leave on the following morning, as Mr. Sedley was not very well; but it had been arranged that Viola was to drive with her to the Manor-House for lunch, returning home to dinner in the evening.

"It appears to me, ma'am, that Mrs. Sedley's own indispo-

sition is not what it should be," said the housekeeper. "I never see anybody look so like death—never !"

This speech, which was intended in the most friendly and complimentary spirit, made Viola turn pale. Her eyes wandered mournfully out to the sea, whose grey waters could this morning be dimly discerned through sheets of driving rain. Mrs. Sedley's white face and the deep, dark circles under the eyes told a tale she would vain have concealed. Last night, when for a short half-hour mother and daughter had been alone together, Viola had entreated to be allowed to return home for a little while, just to look after the invalid, and take some of her old duties again; but Mrs. Sedley, with tears in her eyes, had firmly refused.

"Your duty now is to your husband," she said, "and I will never let you neglect that for my sake."

When the housekeeper left her, Viola remained in precisely the same attitude, gazing out to sea. The waves were tossing restlessly, forming for ever in new vigour, like endless generations, to culminate, and then roll over and lose their individuality in the waste of waters. How fresh and eager they looked as they climbed up to the breaking-point, wearing their crown of surf for a moment, and then, with what a peaceful sweep, they sank to the level of the waters, and lost the fever of their short lives in a gentle annihilation!

Viola's thoughts were breaking the bounds of her teaching. She rose, shook her head angrily, trying to banish them, but they streamed out triumphantly beyond all the limits that she set to their flowing. What had come to her ? Viola remembered, with a sense of relief, that the rest of the day would be passed in her mother's society and in the old scenes. Surely these evil spirits would be exorcised there. Philip was to be out all day; he had business to attend to. Not till evening would he return: and then husband and wife were to have their first *tête-à tête* meal in their own home. If only she could ask Mrs. Barber to come in and take it with them !

With this unholy aspiration in her heart, Viola set out through the driving rain for the Manor-House. The anxious questions which she asked about her mother's health were put aside by Mrs. Sedley: she had never been quite well for the last thirty years; never since the birth of her first child; but she was no worse now than usual. Perhaps to-day and yesterday her head had ached a good deal, but she had nothing to complain of.

"On the rack," Viola wondered, "would she find anything to complain of ?"

Through the rain the familiar outlines of the Manor House loomed into sight. As she alighted at the hall door, she thought she could realize what a spirit must feel who revisited the scenes of its earthly life after passing into the next phase of existence beyond the grave.

After the mid-day meal, at which were assembled exactly the same group as of yore,—father, mother, Geoffrey, and Viola,—the rain cleared, and Geoffrey, not wishing to allow his brotherly affection to clash with his hatred of being indoors, proposed that the assembly should adjourn to the garden.

Here Viola was greeted by a rapturous company of dogs, and behind them came, hopping and flapping excitedly, her jackdaw, whose evident delight to see her again was more eloquently expressed, as Viola said, than that of her relations.

"Well, I do call that ungrateful!" cried Geoffrey, "after all my fornight's practice of the enthusiastic welcome! Geoffrey's embrace had been of the vigorous serio-comic order, by which alone he permitted his British emotions to find expression.

"I say, Viola, I wish you hadn't gone and got married." the brother confided to her when they were marching arm in arm along one of the straight walks of the old fruit-garden. "Life won't be worth living here all by oneself!"

"I am sorry to leave you; but you can come over and see me, of course, whenever you like. And then, you will be very soon leaving home. When do you expect to get your appointment?"

"Oh, Sir Philip is seeing about that for me," said Geoffrey. "Your marriage has its conveniences, Ila.'

She winced.

"I say, what do you think of your husband after five months of his society?" the boy asked, so naïvely, that even Viola, whose sense of humour was certainly not keener than the average, burst out laughing.

"Well, but what *do* you think of him?" persisted Geoffrey.

"I think him very clever, for one thing," she answered.

"And what else?"

"Very determined."

"And——?"

"Very handsome."

"Then I suppose you are very fond of him!"

"One is often fond of people possessing not one of these qualities," returned Viola. "I daresay, in course of time, some foolish person may become fond even of you, for instance—that is, if you cure yourself of the habit of asking questions.

Geoffrey made a grimace. "But, my dear, the subject to a brotherly heart is so interesting."

She smiled sadly. How this old familiar nonsense made her heart ache! Ah! if only she could wipe out the memory of those awful five months, and take up the thread of her life at the point she had left it! Even her mother could no longer protect her against the promptings of her evil nature. In Philip's presence all that was bad and bold and reckless came to the surface; she could not believe as she ought to

believe, she could not feel as she ought to feel; she could not even *pray* as she used to pray. Her life was like some awful dream, and her husband the presence from which her whole being sought to escape in the frantic horror-stricken helplessness of a nightmare.

Never had she felt this helplessness more terribly than she felt it to-day amid the scenes of her former life in the old home, whence a decree of eternal banishment had been spoken. "*Your duty now is with your husband, and I will never let you neglect that for my sake.*"

The old talismans were useless; their virtue had gone out of them.

The future must be faced alone and unbefriended.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SELECT CIRCLE.

UNHAPPILY for herself, Viola was not a person to whom one could remain indifferent. Philip, in spite of his exasperation was still in love with his wife, after his own fashion. It was impossible for him to acquiesce in the cold and distant relations that she wished to establish between them; her conduct amazed and maddened him. In all his wide experience of life he had never heard or dreamt of such a woman. Her character was to him utterly incomprehensible. He could neither frighten her nor soften her; threats, insults, sneers (and he was not sparing of all these), left her as meek and as cold as before.

If she had been a haughty, rebellious woman, giving him insult for insult, sneer for sneer, he might have understood it; but she professed the most complete wifely submission, obeyed him in every detail, and when he reviled her she answered not again. Yet behind all this apparent yielding he knew that there lay something he could not touch—the real woman, who withdrew herself from him, inexorably and forever. A stupider man might have been content when he had so far succeeded in his object as to make her his wife, but Philip knew that this seeming success was after all a humiliating failure; that she had evaded him—*him* of all *men* in the world, despite his utmost efforts!"

It was this exasperating conviction that made his manner towards her—with all its polish—at times absolutely insulting. Her invariable meekness under extreme provocation served rather to increase than to appease him. It left him nothing to attack; he had no handle even for complaint.

Accustomed for so long to absolute dominion, he was driven almost to frenzy by the consciousness of being quietly held at bay by one of the gentlest and most submissive women he had ever met. She had none of the usual little ways of women: one could manage a woman who had little ways; little fits of temper, and little fits of repentance; women who coaxed and pouted alternately. There was something to work upon in all this. But Viola!—when did she lose her temper, or repent, or weep, or ask to be forgiven? When did she plead for a new gown, or coax him for a new bonnet? When did she condescend to be jealous? Had he not pursued Arabella with attentions and compliments till he was sick of the sight of her and her wrigglings? And what notice had Viola taken of his conduct, what remonstrance had she offered? His doings seemed to be perfectly indifferent to her, so long as he kept out of her sight.

It was a scarcely credible situation.

The first few weeks after the return home were very troubled and wretched. Philip seemed to take a delight in humbling and humiliating his wife by every means in his power, and his power in that direction was unlimited. His conduct towards her was of a kind that no woman of her type could forgive, even if she tried.

She knew now the reason of Harry Lancaster's passionate warnings; she knew now why he had said that he would rather see her lying dead before him than married to Philip Dendraith.

He was right.

"Ah! mother, you will never know what I suffer for you; you never *shall* know, for it would break your heart as it has broken mine."

The sense of duty, desperately as it had been assailed, in this hurricane of horror and disaster still held firm as a rock, and still the poor mummied religion which had been given to this passionate heart for a guide held up a withered finger of exhortation.

With these motives and these faiths Viola struggled on, fighting the desperate fight against herself and her own nature, which fills the lives of so many women with inward storm and wreckage. Her faith now was her sole anchor. Without the belief that it was *right* to suffer without complaining, it would have been literally impossible for her to endure her life for another day. Not long after the return of the bride and bridegroom to their home the neighbours began to call upon them,—Mr. and Mrs. Evans, with their eldest daughter; Mr. and Mrs. Pellett (an absent-minded old student and his wife); Mrs. and Miss Featherstone, a fashionable county lady and her daughter, the latter a great huntress; Mrs. Dixie in magnificent sunset effulgence; and finally Arabella, who lived twelve miles away, but who was staying with Lady

Clevedon, and begged to be driven over to call upon her charming niece.

Arabella made a great many awkward though proper assumptions about Viola's supposed state of distraction, if Philip left her for a day or two, and her joy at his return. She was disposed to talk a little archly about "somebody," and to indulge in gentle raillery on the subject of honeymoons, which lasted a good deal longer than one poor month. Viola, unhappily, could not extract the cream of the situation and enjoy it, such as it was, in spite of its grim satire on her real position; it hurt without amusing her.

"Whom the gods intend to destroy," Harry Lancaster once remarked, "they send into the world with a sensitive spirit, *minus* the sense of humour. Whom the gods intend to torture, but to keep alive for further sport, they endow also with a sensitive spirit, but add to it a sense of humour abnormally strong."

The neighbours discussed the new mistress of Upton Castle with perfect freedom, but upon the whole not unfavourably.

The Evans family were even enthusiastically favourable; perhaps because Dick, the family oracle, had pronounced, when he met her at Clevedon Castle before her marriage, that she was a nice, unaffected sort of girl, and "very good form."

Geoffrey, who was a frequent visitor at his sister's house, used often to hear at second-hand the criticisms of her neighbours, and sometimes he would report them to her.

"I say, Ila, my dear," he announced one day, "Mrs. Pellett thinks that you are sinking into a decline."

"She has been comparing notes with Mrs. Barber, then," said Viola, "that is also her opinion."

"You must have found your way to Mrs. Barber's heart," observed Philip; "it is her highest form of compliment. If she loves you, she represents you with one foot in the grave."

"A good attitude to be photographed in," Geoffrey suggested with extravagant foolishness. "A new idea! we could arrange you artistically, with cross-bones, you know, and an extensive churchyard for a background."

Viola smiled, and drew her hand across her eyes as if to erase the heavy lines beneath them.

Geoffrey wanted to know how she liked her new neighbours.

Her judgments were indolently charitable. The only person she actively objected to was Mrs. Pellett, the lady who originated the "decline" theory. The others were all "very pleasant."

"You'll have to go and call on them, you know," said Geoffrey. "You *would* go and get married, and you must take the consequences. Does a woman promise to pay calls in the marriage-service? Rather rough on you, isn't it? Calling doesn't seem in your line."

"That is probably the reason it is given to me to do," said Viola, in all seriousness. "It is a discipline."

Philip had gone to town for a fortnight. Viola managed to cajole her brother into sharing the discipline with her.

"Only two calls to-day," she said; "and it will be such a relief to me!"

She was a little over-hasty in this last conclusion, as she afterwards found to her cost.

The first call was on Mrs. Pellett, "to get it over," Viola said. That exemplary lady lived in a small red brick house on the outskirts of Upton, smothered among trees, and looking very damp and dark.

Ushered into a musty drawing-room, where the blinds were down, the visitors had an opportunity of inhaling the heavy atmosphere, and of surveying the beauties of the room, before the owner appeared. The table was in the exact centre, and in its own centre it wore, like a weight on its heart, a heavy china bowl standing on its head, and supporting (as a father-acrobat, upon the soles of his feet, his little son) a second smaller bowl, this one in its normal attitude.

The glacial severities of the marble mantelpiece were softened by pastoral groups in pink china—gallant swains, and bashful shepherdesses, with dispositions of marvellous sweetness. Let the world growl and grumble as it might, these delightful creatures smiled on untiringly. On the wall beamed the portrait of a lady with pale, glossy hair, and a pink face smooth as a pebble: small blue eyes and attenuated eyebrows, high up out of reach of the eyes, as if they were intended by nature to break the interminable expanse of the forehead which rose majestically above them. In spite of that forehead, no one would have had the temerity to suggest that this lady was a person of intellect. Anything more blandly and virtuously feeble than that face, with its thin, nerveless lips, would be hard to picture.

"I believe she had the front of her head shaved and thrown into that forehead," Geoffrey declared, "and I believe Mrs. Pellett follows her example. Hers is just as fine; its quite grand—like looking up at Mount Olympus."

"O Geoffrey!"

"It ought to look well in a sunset, but wants ruggedness. I wonder——"

Mrs. Pellett, who came in at this juncture, was a good deal like the lady with the Olympian brow, whose portrait, she said, represented her dear mother. The daughter appeared to have more force of character than her pale, pink parent, though she assured the visitors, with pardonable pride, that she could not travel alone for however short a distance, and never left home without her husband.

When Viola saw that kindly, but absent-minded old husband, she wondered how his presence could inspire any sense of security. He might have seen his wife run over by the

slowest of waggons, and never have awakened to the melancholy fact till all was over.

He spent his days buried among his books, whence he emerged with eyes still turned inwards and an unconquerable tendency to answer the frivolities of visitors and of his own family entirely at random.

"My dear, this is Mrs. Philip Dendraith," explained Mrs. Pellett for the second time, in a louder tone, as her husband, though extremely polite and cordial, in a blind-fold sort of fashion, was evidently settling into a contented state of ignorance as to the name and condition of his guests.

"Yes, my dear, so you said—so you said. It is strange," turning to Geoffrey, "that one can live for years in a place and yet remain quite ignorant of one's neighbours. Mr. Philip Dendraith is a name upon everybody's lips, and yet never before have I had the pleasure of meeting him."

Geoffrey's face was a study.

"My dear, you make a mistake," began his wife; "this is not Mr. Dendraith, it is——"

But the old man was at that moment asking Viola if she liked the neighbourhood, whether her father and mother were in good health, and how were all her sisters.

"*Brothers*, dear," remonstrated Mrs. Pellett.

"And brothers," added her husband, blandly. "Your husband looks younger than I expected."

"*Charles!*"

"Well, my dear, I looked for some one rather more mature—not quite so boyish."

"No, I don't look my age, I know," the audacious Geoffrey broke in, seeing Mrs. Pellett had given up her husband in despair and turned to Viola. "My wife often complains about it, but I tell her it's a fault that will mend."

"Yes, yes," said the old scholar, nodding his head, "quite soon enough, quite soon enough. Very interesting old place, that of yours—fine example of later Norman work; but I fear the sea is fast undermining it. My friend Foster there tells me that the water is working its way under the Keep, and that he doesn't think it will last for many years longer."

Geoffrey sadly shook his head.

"I fear it is too true," he said. "I thought of building a breakwater to receive the brunt of the battle just at the point, but I am told that the plan is not feasible. The tide runs too strong."

"A sad pity," said Mr. Pellett in a musing tone; "we are losing all our fine old monuments, between the ferocity of the elements and the ferocity of Vandalic man. But I must not get upon this subject, it is a sore point with me."

"Ah! then we shall sympathise," cried the unprincipled youth, with much feeling. "I too wage deadly war against the destroyers of history, the devourers of the Past."

Upon this, Mr. Pellett, all unsuspicious, took the serpent into his bosom.

"Geoffrey! O Geoffrey!" cried Viola as soon as they were outside the door.

"Yes, yes! I know!" said the youth with a frown and a blush, "let's say no more about it!"

"But how could you? It was really too bad. I don't know what I was saying to Mrs. Pellett, I quite lost my head in my dismay at your behaviour. What possessed you?"

"Don't know, I'm sure!" said Geoffrey, scratching his head uncomfortably. "Thought it would be a lark—once in the mess, couldn't back out—worst of it is Mr. Pellett asked me to go and see him—dashed if I know what name to go under."

"Your own, of course," said Viola, rather severely.

He promised to behave like an archangel during the call at the Rectory, and he followed his sister, hat in hand, into the presence of the Evans family, with an expression that would have done credit to St. Sebastian.

Mrs. Evans was a tall indefinite sort of woman, in nondescript attire; each year of her busy, careful, rather wearing life had left its stamp upon her, not so much in signs of age, as in a certain dim and colourless quality often to be observed among women who have passed their whole lives in a small country village. Married very young, she had missed her girlhood altogether, and began to taste the petty troubles of a woman's life before she had had time to realise any of its possibilities.

Two and two generally make four. Mrs. Evans at fifty was as narrow and dim and petty in thought as she was patient and irreproachable in action. Her opinions had not grown; they had settled upon her like dust from the surrounding atmosphere. A sort of dull tragedy (though her neighbours knew it not) was being acted before their eyes in the picturesque old Rectory with its red-tiled roof and warm lichen-covered walls.

Never from year's end to year's end did Mrs. Evans know what it meant to feel well. Head-ache, back-ache, weakness, weariness, and a thousand nameless oppressions were her constant and merciless companions. Her husband, though he acknowledged in words that his wife "enjoyed weak health," was as blandly ignorant of the actual meaning of those words as though he had spoken in an unknown tongue.

It was in *his* service that she had surrendered so much, and he did not even know it! She was excellent, admirable, but she was quite without charm. Her fellow-creatures, at whose behest she had thus despoiled herself, now turned away from their obedient servant, rewarding her obedience with neglect, veiled under words of cold approbation.

Society has no rewards for the faithful; only curses and stoning for the heretics.

The daughters of the Rectory were pleasant, large-limbed, fresh-looking girls, apparently unlimited in number, and somewhat wanting in variety.

Dorothy, the wild, auburn-haired youngest daughter, was the only one of the family who did not give promise of following in her mother's footsteps. She tore more frocks in one summer than any of her sisters had torn in their lives; she resented gloves, and would not keep her hair tidy. Sometimes she was disobedient, even when her father had commanded, and finally (most ominous sign of all of a lawless disposition) she hated and loathed the admirable Mrs. Pellett with all the force of her young soul. To hate Mrs. Pellett was to hate law and order, to hate respectability, to hate Virtue personified.

According to Dorothy, it was also to hate primness, propriety, and dunderheadedness, not to mention ugly caps and horrible Sunday bonnets, and all the subtle forms of ugliness which a woman of her type can collect around her.

During the call Geoffrey sat uttering meek monosyllables and looking like a chorister. Mrs. Evans remarked after he was gone what a very beautiful expression that young man had, and one of the daughters feared he was going to die young.

Dorothy regarded him with little interest, but she was full of wild enthusiasm about Viola.

She was not a bit like a married lady, Dorothy thought. She had no little airs of importance, no accustomed little phrases, no proper sentiments. The girl's heart went out to her straightway. What unusual quality was there in her voice that made her seem miles apart from every one around her?

There is no feeling more intense and romantic in its own way, than the devotion of a girl to a woman a little older and more experienced than herself. No lover ever admired more enthusiastically, or worshipped more devoutly.

Dorothy had already entered upon the first stage of such an experience. She begged to be taken to call at Upton Castle, much to the surprise of her brethren, for the scapegrace of the family would usually undergo any penance rather than submit to this vexatious social usage. When Viola came to the Rectory Dorothy hung upon her words, and treasured her every glance.

As for Geoffrey, he established himself on almost brotherly terms with the whole family; and the family quickly had to reconsider their views about him in the capacity of chorister and the probability of his coming to an early grave.

"He is one of those people who live to be a discipline to their friends, to an aggravating old age," said Dick.

Dick was the member of the family with whom Viola found that she had most in common. He began, after a time, to

confide his hopes and his troubles to her, and to turn to her for sympathy. The friendship that sprang up between them was the one wholesome and natural element in her life.

Chilled, stunted as her nature had been, it began now to put forth pale little shoots towards the light, a piece of audacity which society in alarm set to work at once to punish and to check. Mrs. Pellett, to do her justice, had been the first to notice the growing intimacy between Dick and Viola, and she had thought it her duty (never had human being so many and such various duties as Mrs. Pellett!) to give a hint to the rector's wife on the subject.

"Mr. Dendraith is a good deal away," said Mrs. Pellett, "and although I am sure your son is all that he should be, and dear Mrs. Dendraith is a—ahem a most highly principled young woman, it does not do to set people talking. There is nothing more unpleasant."

And so on.

Thus it happened that on Saturday afternoons, when Dick came to the Rectory from his work in town, Viola was seldom or never there.

Mrs. Evans would have been wiser to have let matters alone, for Dick now used often to walk over to Upton Castle on Sunday afternoons; and as Philip was seldom in, Viola and her visitor would take a walk by themselves, as if Mrs. Pellett had never been born. They used sometimes to spend a quiet hour in the ruins, enjoying the sea air and the wonderful changes in the lines of ocean and sky which could be so well seen from this romantic spot.

Always they would knock at Caleb Foster's door in the old keep, to enquire for his well-being, and to lure him from his stronghold for a talk. Mrs. Pellett, however, soon found out what was going on.

"My dear," she said, on one memorable occasion when she had interrupted Dick in some confidence about a love affair, "my dear, excuse the frankness of a sincere well-wisher, but don't you think it would be wise to give that young man a hint not to come here quite so often?"

"Not so often?" repeated Viola, in a dazed manner.

Mrs. Pellett took her hand.

"You are inexperienced, dear Mrs. Dendraith; you don't know how careful one ought to be not to give rise to talk."

Viola gazed at her visitor in stony silence.

"So very little will do it," pursued the monitress, soothingly.

"So it appears!"

"Of course I say this out of a friendly desire for your welfare."

"You are very good!"

"I daresay," pursued the lady, with delicate tact, "I daresay you are glad to welcome even unsuitable visitors to your house because you lead rather a lonely life and no doubt feel

dull now and then; but you know we must not allow our little trials to turn us from the strict path of duty and prudence--I am sure you agree with me."

Viola bowed.

"The true way to avoid being dull is to keep oneself always occupied," continued Mrs. Pellett; "now, for example, I am busy from morning till night, and I don't know what it is to be dull."

"No!" said Viola.

"It is right that we should all do some work, whatever be our station."

"I think most people would be glad to work, if only they do the work they can do best."

"Ah! but it is not for us to *choose*," said Mrs. Pellett; "we have to take what is appointed for us, and simply do our duty."

Viola followed an audacious impulse.

"What is duty?" she enquired.

Mrs. Pellett looked startled and uneasy. Wherein lay the advantage of platitude if one was to be mentally knocked about in this manner?

"Our duty," said the lady, majestically, "is the—well, in fact, the duty that has been given to us to perform by a Higher Power."

Viola gazed at her in silence.

"Of course," pursued Mrs. Pellett, waving aside the subject as now worked out, "of course, dear Mrs. Dendraith, we all feel that your life at present is a little quiet and dull,—your husband being so much away,—but some day we hope that there will be quite a different state of things. No doubt we shall hear the patter of little feet about the house; and then there will be no time to be dull, will there?"

Mrs. Pellett's manner was archly encouraging.

Viola seemed turned to stone. She neither moved nor spoke. She only looked at her visitor with an expression of mingled loathing and defiance which must have pierced any shell of self-complacency less adamantine than Mrs. Pellett's. Viola knew what was expected of her; a pleased embarrassment at the mention of that which she was taught in the same breath to regard as the most blessed and desirable of contingencies. Mrs. Pellett's manner and expression excited in her a sickening fury, and sent the waves of colour surging to her cheeks, so that she had the misery of knowing herself to be apparently responding with the utmost propriety exactly as custom required. The painful flush deepened, and spread over neck and brow, while Mrs. Pellett smiled approvingly, and finally made some remark that filled the cup of disgust to overflowing.

Like frantic prisoners, shaking their prison-bars, the words came clambering for egress to the closely set lips. "You are a fool, you are an idiot, you are *intolerable*."

"Well, my dear," said the unconscious Mrs. Pellett, smiling, "we won't anticipate these joys if you would rather not——"

Viola drew a sharp breath.

"But I thought you wouldn't mind it with me, you know—and of course it *would* be such a happiness and a comfort to you all—you must pray, my dear. Where there is a property, it is so especially desirable."

Still no answer. How could she speak to such a woman without making a more than ever detestable hotch-potch of misunderstanding?

Viola had not philosophy enough to thrust aside her disgust and forget the incident. Mrs. Pellett's plain, pompous face, with its look of irreproachable vacuity, haunted her long afterwards.

But Mrs. Pellett was not the only offender, nor was hers the only kind of offence. Viola had to learn that as a married woman she was expected to listen with amusement to anecdotes and allusions which were considered sullying to the innocence of a girl. She sickened with anger and misery, and dreaded inexpressibly to meet the neighbours, because among them—as she considered—she was always liable to insult. Marriage seemed to her nothing less than an initiation into things base and unlovely, infringing the dignity of womanhood.

The blackness of her solitude made these wounded feelings doubly hard to bear, and the sense of humiliation became so terrible, that even suicide—which her mother had taught her to place on the same level as murder—grew less heinous in her imagination, as the impulse to fling away the horrors and the indignities of life became more and more frantically importunate.

Not long after Mrs. Pellett's warning on the subject of Dick Evans, Philip happened to find him with Viola in the ruins. The look of suffering had gone, for the time, from her eyes, for Dick was talking to her about the sea, and its silent ceaseless work of building and destruction; about the crumbling of the land along the coast, and the erection during long centuries of great beds of chalk, formed from the shells of myriad of tiny creatures,—little throbs of momentary sensation in the bosom of the ages.

The sea-breeze was blowing up fresh and blue; the clouds overhead thronged across the pale sky as if inspired by some joyous passion.

Philip met Dick Evans with seeming pleasure, and the three stood talking together for a few minutes.

Presently Dick went off to speak to Caleb Foster, who was at the door of the keep, sharpening a carpenter's axe upon a grindstone, and then Philip turned to his wife.

"My dear," he said, "do you know that this is the third time this week that Dick Evans has been here?"

"Yes," said Viola.

"Though the very last man in the world to be jealous, I am also the last man in the world to allow my wife to be talked about. You will be good enough in future not to go out walking with Dick Evans. Of course he can call when he likes, but there must be nothing more."

"Ah! I enjoyed those walks," said Viola in a low voice, almost as if she were speaking to herself.

Her husband gave a slight amused smile,—the remark seemed to him so *naïf*.

"You can get one of his sisters to go with you; that will do just as well, and better, from a social point of view."

An expression of utter despair came into her eyes, but she said nothing. Philip looked at her fixedly, and his lips gave a curious twist as he turned away with a muttered remark that he was going to walk over to Upton Court and would not be back to luncheon.

Dick presently returned with Caleb Foster, who proceeded to give an instructive dissertation upon ontology, with copious illustrations from Kant and Hegel, till the solid earth seemed to Viola to swim from beneath their feet, the wind and sea and the steep white cliffs to grow alike imponderable. Dick's robust animal consciousness and his absence of metaphysical instinct finally roused him to violent rebellion.

"In the name of common-sense, my dear Foster——"

Caleb gave a sigh. "Common-sense!" he cried dejectedly; "if you are going to appeal to common-sense, sir, I have nothing more to say; we must at once drop the chain of logic." He opened his thin fingers, as if actually letting go that ponderous object.

"But I deny that the two things are incompatible," objected Dick. The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Common-sense may be a crude sort of wisdom; but logical it is not, or I think this globe of ours would be rather less distracted than we find it."

"Saved by a syllogism!" observed Dick musingly.

Caleb shortly after this returned to his work, and then Dick proposed to Viola that they should go for a walk.

"I want to show you those Saxon barrows upon the Downs that I spoke to you about. You said you would like to see them."

Viola coloured. Philip had forbidden her to go again for walks with Dick. Her only strong pleasure, her one source of fresh and wholesome ideas, was to be given up; and at the thought an impulse of rebellion sprang up within her, fierce and desperate.

"Do they all want to drive me mad or wicked?"

"Will you come," asked Dick casually, expecting her assent as a matter of course.

"Yes, I will come!" she said, with set lips. But all pleasure in Dick's society had ceased. The sense of wrong-doing

stalked like a spectre beside her, dogging her footsteps, go where she might.

In vain the sweet wind blustered round her, in vain the untamed monster at the cliff's foot flung its vast bulk upon the complaining stones, muttering the secrets of the ages. A little fretting chain, holding her to the small and local elements of her life, pinioned her joyous impulses, and sounded its familiar "chink, chink," in her ears.

"You seem tired," said the young man, checking his impetuous speed.

Had she answered as Nature dictated, she would have brought dismay into his manly bosom by bursting into tears. The wildness of the scene, the appeal of the lark's song overhead, and of the old, old song of the sea were almost more than she could bear. She felt like an outcast from all these elemental things, an exile from the world of reality and joy.

But though her heart spoke strongly, her training was loud-voiced also. Habit triumphed over impulse.

"I am a little tired," she said; "the wind is pushing hard against us."

"Let us rest then," Dick proposed; "the wind has long ago swept up all moisture; we can safely sit upon the grass;" and he flung himself at full length on the slope, while Viola, tired rather in mind than in body, sank down wearily beside him.

Her big retriever, Triton, like an embodied Rapture, was racing across the Downs. Viola called to him in her sweet vibrating voice, but he did not hear till Dick's shout joined issue with the gale. Then the dog turned, and came tearing back, his brown body scorning the earth in its passage. He bounded up, happy and affectionate, to his mistress. "If I must part with every other friend, at least I shall always have you till you die," she said with a pathetic little caress. "But you will desert me, and go away into the Silent Land, and then——"

"You will get another Triton," said Dick, with a good-natured laugh.

"But these beautiful brown eyes will not be forgotten. Where can you find a human spirit like this?"

"You are always a little hard on us poor humans," said Dick; "after all, most of us mean well enough, though perhaps we make rather a mess of the doing."

"In men and women," Viola returned, "I miss the generous, faithful soul of a creature like this. If I could meet any one—man, woman, or child—one half as noble, I would set him on a pedestal and worship him to my life's end."

"Not a bit of it," said Dick, laughing; "you would long for a little amiable human weakness in your deity, and haul him down again,—or worse still, poor fellow, leave him there in cold and solitary glory, like another Simon Stylites."

Viola shook her head.

"Look at these eyes. Where can you find human eyes as beautiful?"

"Well, I know, at any rate, one man and one woman who surpass old Triton in that point; and curiously enough, they possess just those qualities that you admire so much in him!"

"Do I know the people?"

"You know one of them—Harry Lancaster."

"Oh!" said Viola, abruptly.

"The other is his friend Mrs. Lincoln. No doubt you have heard of her, as she has taken that little house belonging to your father-in-law, on the coast—what is it called? Fir Lodge, or Fir Dell, or something of that sort."

"Fir Dell," said Viola. "Yes, I know about her!"

"People here won't call upon her because she is separated from her husband; but I must say she seems to me a very refined, lady-like sort of woman, and I know Harry Lancaster thinks her little short of an angel; in fact, I sometimes fancy he is a little bit in love with her."

"But—but she is married!" said Viola.

Dick smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "He is just the sort of fellow to cherish a '*grande passion*' for the unattainable."

Viola threw her arms round her dog's neck, and laid her cheek against his head, so that her face was turned from her companion. "I think I am rested now," she said presently; "shall we go on?"

The pause seemed to have imbued her with amazing strength, for her pace now rivalled Triton's, and Dick laughingly asked her if she were training for a race.

"Am I walking fast?" she enquired abruptly, slackening speed. On sea and sky, on the grass at her feet, a face with pleading eyes was gazing at her sorrowfully.

"You look pale," said Dick, in his kind, chivalrous way; "have I taken you too far?"

"No, no."

"It seems to me you might take the prize in a two-mile race across-country."

They paced on in silence for some moments; then Dick said, "You have never seen Mrs. Lincoln, I suppose?"

"Never!"

"She is a very curious woman—dreadfully clever, but I rather like her. As for her opinions—I fear they would shock you, Mrs. Dendraith."

"Does she dissent from the Church?"

Dick stopped, and broke into a loud shout of laughter. "Mrs. Lincoln cares as much about the Church as she cares about the Upton ladies. There are rumors afloat that she is a follower of Zoroaster, or a Buddhist."

Viola looked aghast.

"And that she worships those very ugly little figures that

you see in Oriental shops. They say she buys them by the dozen."

"Impossible!"

"It is also said," Dick pursued, "that she is building herself a little temple off her drawing-room, like a conservatory, and that she means to found a Buddhist monastic system, and make Harry Lancaster high-priest!"

"And he admires such a woman!"

"You would forgive him if you saw her!"

"Never!" said Viola.

Dick held out his hand to help her up the last few feet of the barrow which stood beside two or three other hillocks on the highest point of the downs, commanding a view of the usual incredible number of counties.

Dick then began to discourse upon the probable history of these old relics of our forefathers, upon the different races that had peopled Britain, with round heads, long heads, or coffin-shaped heads, each race having buried its dead in barrows of distinctive form, so that these burial-places told part of their story to the archæologist at the first glance. Dick went on to relate some legends, full of the wild poetry of northern sea-girt, melancholy lands, haunted by mist and storm.

Viola leant back, and listened dreamily. With her head pillowed upon the soft grass, she could watch the clouds drifting, and melting, and streaming, wind-intoxicated, across the heavens; scarcely was the earth visible at all. She grew conscious of a brilliant circle of blue hills and a shimmer of universal light. The sense of trouble faded away. Fate had granted her a moment's amnesty.

Viola heaved a long, deep sigh. The vividness of her personality was dimmed, its edges lost their sharpness, and her consciousness seemed to spread out and extend into the outlying world of air and sunshine, and the limitless ether that lay above.

The voice of the story-teller ceased, and the windy silence of the downs closed softly round and about. Dick, after a few minutes, looked at his companion. "Are you asleep?"

"Yes, and dreaming."

She did not move, but lay with closed eyes, peacefully.

"May I know your dream?"

"It was of wind and waves—of a world where there is no romance, and happiness, and rest; where—" Viola suddenly raised her head and sat upright, the peace all gone from her face—"and where there are no Mrs. Pelletts!"

Dick laughed.

"Why, Mrs. Dendraith, you are not so good, after all, as I though you! Mrs. Lincoln might rebel against Mrs. Pellett, but *you*—and apropos of that, I fear we shall have to be going. I see we have been out three hours! Remember, you

have public opinion to consider, a position to keep up, and Mrs. Pellett to confront!"

"If I committed a murder," exclaimed Viola, as she sprang to her feet, "I should not think it necessary to apologise to Mrs. Pellett!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER, AND FRIEND.

As Philip was not home to luncheon on that day of iniquity, he did not discover his wife's act of insubordination till she took it upon herself to inform him. Though very angry at the moment of confession, he was disarmed by her frankness.

"Don't let this happen again, however," he said. "I seldom lay commands upon you, but when I do, I mean them to be obeyed."

The walks thenceforth were given up, and Dick had now to content himself with paying formal calls at Upton Castle, when he found Viola nervous and constrained, looking paler and more lifeless each time he came.

"I begin to half believe in Mrs. Pellett's theory about 'the decline,'" he said anxiously to his mother, who shook her head and feared that the poor young thing had not long to live.

On one occasion Viola called at the Rectory immediately after Mrs. Pellett's departure, and found her devoted admirer, Dorothy, fuming with indignation. It seemed that Mrs. Pellett, with her usual enlarged views about duty, had just returned from an incursion upon the Manor House, where she had been kindly mentioning to Mrs. Sedley what she, and many others at Upton, thought about dear Viola's sad appearance.

The Bulwark (as Harry Lancaster used to call her) had dropped in on her way back to explain to her friends at the Rectory how much trouble she had been taking in the cause of virtue. Dorothy stamped her foot.

"I was burning to throw an antimacassar at her head!" exclaimed that impulsive young person. "The way she sat there, swelling with importance and propriety! Ugh! I wish she had burst like the frog in the fable—and then we should have heard no more about her!"

"Oh, consummation devoutly to be wished!" cried Dick. "Fancy having the trouble to go all that way first to see Mrs. Sedley and frighten her out of her wits—the old idiot!"

This last epithet appeared so pointedly to apply to Mrs. Sedley, that Dorothy stammered and explained. "I suppose I ought to be grateful to Mrs. Pellett," said Viola, "but I am not: I *hate* Mrs. Pellett!"

Dorothy stared for a moment, and then broke out into laughter and embraces.

"Hurray!" she called out at the top of her voice. "I thought you couldn't hate any one!"

Viola gave a little "Oh" that was very expressive.

"Can you hate with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your heart?" inquired Dorothy.

"I fear I can."

"So much the better," said Dorothy after an astonished pause; "people who can love can always hate."

"But they oughtn't to!" said Viola.

Theologically Dorothy agreed, but humanly she didn't see it.

"If people are nasty," she argued, "they were made to be hated."

Viola rather demurred at this; but Dorothy urged that (for instance) sheep and cattle, being good to eat, are meant by a considerate Providence to be eaten (her father had explained that in his sermon last Sunday): therefore, by analogy, people who are suitable for being hated are meant to be hated. No one could love a black-beetle, and no one could love Mrs. Pellett (except her husband). Dorothy, in an awed whisper, even went so far as to say that she didn't think God himself could love Mrs. Pellett!

The girl's expressions of devotion to Viola were as enegetic as her denouncement of her *bête noire.*

"I do love you so! there is nothing in the world that I wouldn't do for you. I wish you would try me."

"Supposing I did something very wicked——"

"You couldn't!" cried Dorothy.

"But suppose it for a moment."

"Still I should love you, and stick to you through thick and thin. It is impossible for you to be you and for me not to love you."

"Then I am not quite alone in the world!" said Viola.

"Alone in the world! Why, every one that knows you thinks you are an angel. Dick, for instance,—oh! he loves you so! Do you love Dick?"

"Almost," said Viola: and Dorothy thenceforth went about imparting the interesting information that Dick and Viola loved each other to distraction.

Mrs. Pellett's interposition (interference, Dorothy called it) was, of course, effectual in rousing Mrs. Sedley's fears. Her daughter found it very difficult to lull her suspicions that something was wrong, however careful she might be to seem in good health and spirits.

"I assure you I am quite well," Viola used to say again and again, but her looks belied her words.

Mrs. Barber's compliments fell thick and fast. The two never met, but the housekeeper would exclaim in sepulchral tones: "Well, M'am, you *do* look ill-disposed, that you do!"

Though Dorothy's assertion that every one in Upton thought Viola an angel was not quite accurate, her quiet, unassuming manner and gentle expression had partly disarmed the criticism of the village, severely just.

"The present topic of conversation here," Adrienne Lancaster wrote to her brother, who was now with his regiment in Ireland, "is Mrs. Philip Dendraith. I feel sure there is something in her a little out of the ordinary. I am determined to know her better; it will not be difficult, as she is so often at the Rectory. I doubt if she is quite happy; if she is not, it is probably her own fault: some people lack the right temperament for happiness. Perhaps you will say that she lacks the right *husband;* but I fancy happiness is a thing which a husband can neither give nor take away."

Adrienne carried out her intention of becoming more intimate with Mrs. Dendraith, but the manner in which the friendship was cemented differed materially from her own forecasts.

Matters had been going rather slowly, for Viola's reserve seemed invincible, when something happened which shook things out of their course.

"Since my last letter, dear Harry," wrote Adrienne, "a most astonishing event has happened: *I have had a proposal!* And from whom do you think, of all people in the world? From—I wish I could see your face when you read this—from Bob Hunter! Think of it! Bob with all his jokes and his acres at my feet! Perhaps I oughtn't to tell you, but it was too comic an episode to keep to myself. Augusta says it would scarcely be Christian."

Bob Hunter was a wealthy young man, with a property at about eight miles from Upton. Most people said he was mad; a few said he was clever, perhaps because he had attained so much celebrity as a skilful baffler of designing mothers. These doomed ones he so overwhelmed with quips and quirks and mad sayings, so confused with and interlaced with pun, meaning hooked into meaning, that they lost all hope and presence of mind.

At one of the Rectory tennis parties Viola found her mental horizon enlarged by an introduction to this incredibly eccentric creature. There is nothing to equal an abnormal human being for putting to rout one's narrow preconceptions. Bob was a lank and weedy young man, with a long pale ugly face, colourless hair and eyelashes. Life to him was one long farce. Viola felt as if she had come in contact with a being from another sphere. She had an opportunity of watching him "confounding the knavish tricks" of Mrs. Featherstone,

a county lady with a hunting daughter to marry, both veterans retiring from the field utterly routed and crestfallen.

"She that captures Bob Hunter," that agile person remarked after a little caper of jubilation on the tennis-court, "must be swifter than Atalanta."

"Ah! Mr. Hunter," said Adrienne, "if some aspirant were only wise enough to avoid pursuing you, you would come and tamely lay yourself down at her feet!"

Bob looked at her gravely, pirouetted slightly according to his custom, and danced off to the other end of the lawn.

Later in the afternoon Adrienne and Viola were strolling together in a retired part of the garden. Adrienne had been trying to draw Viola out, and Viola was showing a perverse inclination to give her new acquaintance the benefit of her ideas about the difference between the temperature of to-day and the temperature of the day before yesterday.

They were not too much engrossed in their meteorological discussion to become aware of the approach of Bob Hunter. He came forward, dancing in little triplets, and hailing the two ladies as they established themselves on a rustic seat at the end of the path, with an appropriate quotation from the poets.

This was all in his usual manner and caused Adrienne no surprise, but what followed fairly took her breath away, and made Viola grow hot and cold from sheer amazement.

"Wise and lovely one," said Bob, addressing Adrienne, "your words are full of the wisdom of the Egyptians! She that pursueth not arriveth at the goal; she that hunteth is taken in the snare of the fowler, and the birds of the air laugh her to scorn. Julia Featherstone, that accursed damsel, shall be humbled; Adrienne Lancaster, because that she hath passed by on the other side, verily she shall be exalted. Not she, but her adorer, taketh the lowest place. Even according to his word he layeth himself (irrespective of a clay soil) at her feet."

And before a word could be uttered, Bob Hunter was sprawling at full length on the ground.

"Mr. Hunter, for Heaven's sake, get up!" exclaimed Adrienne. "You are really too ridiculous!"

"Nay, cruel one, but I love you," remarked Bob in an explanatory manner. (No, please don't go, Mrs. Dendraith, I prefer to have an umpire on these occasions.) Adrienne, at your feet I lay myself and all that I possess. Will you have me?"

"Do get up, Mr. Hunter!"

"Give me your hand, then!"

"Suppose some of the tennis players were to come and see you in this ridiculous attitude!"

"I thought it was graceful," said Bob. "O you who abound in grace, yet have no grace for me, I will arise and go to my Featherstone!"

"Pray, do!"

"What! a woman, and not jealous!" He sprang ardently

to his feet. "Still more am I yours, still more must I worship this rare and charming bird!" He began to skip about and execute elaborate steps, talking all the time, and showering puns, quotations, allusions upon his astonished audience.

He kissed Adrienne's hand, he called her "adamantine," he became like Irving in Hamlet.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Adrienne, "was there ever such a proposal before in history?"

By this time she was laughing helplessly, and the more she laughed the more extravagantly Bob Hunter behaved. Yet he managed to make her understand that he meant his proposal seriously, and intended to persevere with his eccentric suit till she gave in.

"Of course it is a 'splendid chance' for me," said Adrienne rather bitterly, when her wooer had, at last, consented to pirouette back to the tennis-ground; "Miss Featherstone and her mother have been angling for him for years, and Miss Featherstone has a dozen 'chances' (as they are flatteringly called) to my—none! Mother would be wild if she knew I had refused him!—and all my counsellors, male and female, would hold up hands of dismay at my folly. I wonder whether they are right or I. If I don't marry, I shall live on in this dead, foolish, gossiping little village, trying to make two ends meet, and talking empty nonsense with my neighbours! I have no place in life, no interest; my time is swallowed up in a mere struggle with petty household details, a struggle to keep up appearances and live as becomes 'our station.' My mother's whole existence has become absorbed in that effort, and mine too! If I married——"

She paused and sighed.

"If I married, I suppose details of another kind would take up my time; I should have to gossip and talk nonsense, perhaps, on a larger scale, and then——"

"And then you would have to learn to smile when people insulted you," Viola put in, "and to smile again when they took you by the arm and whispered loathsome things in your ear, and again to smile when—" her voice broke—"when you realised that you had given up all right to resent what they said, for in accepting your position, you had accepted these things, and as many more—this side of madness—as might happen to offer themselves."

Viola was almost breathless when she stopped speaking.

"Mrs. Dendrith!" exclaimed Adrienne.

"Miss Lancaster!" said Viola, and the two women stood facing one another in the pathway.

"I don't think you take things in quite the right spirit," observed Adrienne at length, her theories getting the better of a first sympathetic impulse; "a woman can make marriage into a Holy of holies. Think how sacred an office it may be; how a woman may serve and minister, and make her life one long, lovely self-sacrifice."

Viola was shivering from head to foot, so that she could not answer.

"Believe me, there is no position in which opportunities for heroism do not exist, but the position of wife and mother has always been, and surely always will be, the best, noblest, and holiest that a woman can fill."

Viola shuddered. "I am very wicked, I know," she said. "I can't be patient under insult, and to be married seems to lay one open to insult and to rob one of the very right to resent it."

"I don't understand," cried Adrienne. "I daresay people are vulgar and impertinent, but what does that matter after all?"

Viola turned away. She could not speak of it further, and Adrienne's succeeding remarks were received without opposition and without response. This conversation, however, was the beginning of a closer acquaintance. Adrienne studied her new friend, and soon formed a neat, compact little judgment about her, which satisfied herself, and was very serviceable for every-day use, since Viola never showed enough of herself to invalidate the theory.

Miss Lancaster thought that she might have influence for good over her new friend, and being always zealous in well-doing, she tore herself occasionally from her numerous home-duties to spend a day or two at Upton Castle. The mentor noticed with approval Viola's continual self-suppression, her cheerfulness in her mother's presence, her disregard of headaches and other signs of ill-health, and her evident determination to do her duty.

But this was mere stoicism and power of will; not the smiling acceptance of one's troubles, the sweet welcoming of tribulation which delighted Adrienne's dutiful soul.

"It is a great comfort," said that adviser judiciously—"it is a great comfort that, however we may be placed, duty is never far to seek. Life is full of bitter disappointments" (the speaker sighed heavily), "and there is much pain and anxiety to bear; but if we keep up a brave heart and do well what lies to our hand, we shall assuredly feel a quiet joy and satisfaction which nothing else in this world can give. Do you not find it so?"

"A quiet joy and satisfaction?" enquired Viola, turning her hungry, melancholy eyes upon her companion.

That look seemed to be answer enough, for Adrienne took her hand and said earnestly: "I fear, dear Viola, that you are not so happy as you might be. I see there are sad things in your lot, as there are in most lots, yet I think there are elements of happiness too, if you would take advantage of them. Your husband is fond of you——"

The speaker paused, in case Viola should have anything to say on this head, but she answered nothing, and Adrienne continued: "He is ready to give you anything you desire;

you have a comfortable, even luxurious home, and no anxiety about money mattters! No one knows what that means except those who *have* such anxiety. Viola, sometimes, in my weak moments, I feel inclined to ask if it is worth while struggling on, with these never-ceasing little economies, these never-ceasing efforts to make one shilling play the part of two. But then come little solaces and pleasures, and after the fit of depression you pluck up a brave heart again and go on. After all, it is duty, and that makes it possible and right."

Viola assented.

"I don't tell you about my own petty griefs, except to let you see that you have companions in trouble all around you—"

"I never doubted it for a moment."

"—and that you are spared a very great deal of ceaseless worry, by having no anxiety with regard to those odious pounds, shillings, and pence!"

There was a long pause. Then Viola made a remark, not at all in the spirit which Adrienne had intended to call forth.

"I really don't see what is the use of our all coming into the world to struggle and battle in this way; it is so very"—she paused—"ridiculous."

"I don't think so," Adrienne returned hastily. "There is not one of us but can do some little good in the world if he will only use his opportunities."

"If we all *can*, we all don't—I mean, we don't all," said Viola; "and the few that do do a little good are overbalanced by the many that do a little harm. Of course one must do one's duty, but I feel sometimes as if it were altogether hopeless and useless."

Adrienne's orthodox views on this point had ferreted out of their hiding-places Viola's new and secret heresies. She was alarmed at them herself as soon as the words were uttered, and meekly accepted Adrienne's next argument without a word.

"It is not a hopeless struggle, dear Viola, if once we realise the beauty and the blessedness of *sacrifice*. That is the key to all the terrible problems of life; that alone makes us understand, if but dimly, that the highest good is to be got out of pain, and that the most blessed life is the life of sorrow."

Viola had it on her lips to say: "Then we ought to inflict upon one another as much sorrow as we can, in order that we may all quickly attain blessedness," but she changed her mind, and gave a hurried murmur of acquiescence.

Adrienne little guessed what demons she had raised by her "judicious" influence.

All this time, Bob Hunter, in the most persevering manner, was pursuing his eccentric suit. Before long, Mrs. Dixie became joyfully aware of what had happened, and was now making her daughter's life a burden to her by urgent entreaties to accept the advantageous proposal. The old lady sought and obtained the sympathy of the rector's wife in her bitter

disappointment, and as for Mrs. Pellett, she thought Adrienne's conduct was wanting in principle. If her poor dear mother's death were to be hastened by this ridiculous refusal, Mrs. Pellett hoped that Adrienne would not be overwhelmed with lifelong remorse—she sincerely hoped that she would not suffer in that excruciating manner. Adrienne was deeply troubled. Her mother had really worried herself ill, and Bob kept coming to open up the sore afresh.

"Very likely it is your last chance," said Mrs. Dixie, tearfully. "We see so few people in this retired village, and what is to become of you after I am gone if you do not make a home for yourself now? O Adrienne! you know the fate of an unmarried woman who has to make her own living. Don't sadden my declining years by the thought that I have to leave you alone in the world, and penniless."

Adrienne shivered. All that her mother said was so ghastly true.

Marriage without love, or——!

"Viola, under any conceivable circumstances would you have married Bob Hunter?"

"Yes, under *some* conceivable circumstances," Viola replied, "and so I expect would you and most women. My husband says that every woman has her price!"

"But you don't believe that, surely!" exclaimed Miss Lancaster, much shocked.

"I'm afraid I do," said Viola.

Her companion gazed at her searchingly.

"You mean that every woman would marry for money or position, if only she were offered money and position enough?"

"Oh! no; different women sell themselves for different things; some for money and position, some for money and position for their relations, some for the happiness of another person—yes, I think that every woman has her price," she repeated.

"It seems almost a crime to marry without love," said Adrienne gravely.

Viola paused.

"It may sometimes be a crime to *refuse* to marry without love, may it not?" she suggested.

"Never; unless perhaps some one's life were at stake,—and even then—well, it is a difficult question. If it *is* a crime to marry for money, the punishment must be awful."

There was a long, significant pause.

"How difficult it sometimes is to clearly see one's duty!" exclaimed Adrienne. (Only a few weeks ago she had talked so glibly and so comfortably about duty.) "Is it purity of motive or is it egotism that makes a woman shrink from marrying to please her relations?"

"Well may she shrink!" cried Viola.

"Yet I do believe firmly," said Adrienne, "that the domes-

tic life and its interests call out a woman's best qualities; that before she marries she has scarcely lived."

Viola was silent.

"If one could only be married without a husband!" exclaimed Adrienne, laughing; "*he* is the drawback! Poor Bob! He would keep me in jokes, wouldn't he? But oh! the awfulness of having that creature perpetually about one! I like to be able to look up to a man."

"Yes, but it is so difficult," said Viola naïvely, at which her companion laughed.

Time went on, and Bob continued to press his suit.

Mrs. Pellett, the indefatigable, one day electrified Upton by the information that she had seen Mr. Hunter going up the avenue of Fir Dell to call on "that Mrs. Lincoln."

"That comes of not saying 'Yes' when she had a chance," said Mrs. Pellett. "Perhaps she'll see how silly she was, now that it may be too late."

"Viola, the necessity for decision has been removed from me!" said Adrienne. "Bob Hunter has deserted me for Mrs. Lincoln."

Viola turned pale.

"I wish that woman had never come here!" she exclaimed.

"So do I!" assented Adrienne, "for more reasons than—Bob Hunter. It is strange how unprincipled women seem to have a hold over men, which good women seldom achieve."

Adrienne ran over the list of good women—Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Dixie, Mrs. Sedley, Mrs. Pellett—and shook her head.

"You wouldn't suspect my brother Harry of being led astray by a bad woman; and yet he sits at Mrs. Lincoln's feet—indeed, I sadly fear he is deeply attached to her—of course, this is between ourselves. It has long been a great trouble to me. Poor Harry! He is such a fine, generous, passionate creature that, when he once loves, it is like tearing the heart out to deprive him of his ideal. I, like you, wish to Heaven the woman had never come here!"

"She must be very wicked," said Viola.

"Very wanting in womanly feeling, at any rate," Adrienne amended. "I cannot understand a self-respecting woman allowing herself to be talked about in the way Mrs. Lincoln is talked about. I would undergo tortures rather than that!"

"You would rather submit to be talked to, as a woman is talked to (and about) after she is married," suggested Viola, with a vivid flush. "I can't say that I think, as far as talking is concerned, that one gains so much by remaining respectable."

"Oh, my dear Viola, for Heaven's sake, don't say such things; it grieves me to hear you."

As Adrienne herself had not been guiltless of little vulgarities, which Viola disliked and resented, no answer was forthcoming to this remonstrance.

Things were going very badly at the Castle just at present. Philip was always at home, and this for Viola meant a greater amount of suffering. There was no respite. The day was dull and weary and filled with a thousand trials and annoyances great and small; but the night—the time for stillness, solitude, and repose, the time to built up strength and draw in new hope and peace—the night was a living hell!

She might never be alone, never feel that she possessed herself; her very thoughts were scarcely free. "Freedom" was an unknown word; the only words that ruled in that red-hot purgatory were "right," "duty," "submission."

What inmate of the harem, she used to wonder, ever endured slavery more absolute than this? If she could but tear out heart and soul, so that she might remain a mere shell, animate but not sentient, and let *that* stay and be wife, housekeeper, mother,—whatever was wanted,—it would do its part better than she did it, and there would be none of this hatred and loathing, this sinful, invincible shrinking from her accepted duty. What heaven could be worth such a price!

She was now utterly alone, cut off from human help; for even Harry's interest had been led elsewhere. The protecting hand whose finger-tips had been slowly slipping away was now quite withdrawn.

A punishment this, thought Viola, for daring to let her mind dwell among the memories of those scenes before her marriage, when Harry had tried so hard to save her.

The longing for unconsciousness, for death, became unappeasable—to be mercifully wafted away to some quiet region where there was no heart-ache, no indignity, no altar where the souls and bodies of women were offered up in sacrifice, while the honourable and respected of the earth danced round singing songs of triumph. What though that gentle world were canopied with clouds shutting out the sunshine of the earth? What though vapours still and sullen hovered there, lulling the spirit in a dreamless rest? The sweetness of life, the glory of the world was not for her; welcome then the land of silence and of shadows, where sorrow was laid to sleep and the throb of misery ceased. Not even the fear that it was wicked to long so for what Heaven had not willed, could overcome the yearning.

It seemed as if things *could* not go on much longer in their present state, and yet it was evident that there would be no sudden break. Mrs. Sedley had done her work too well.

There was at this time many small difficulties of the petty and worrying order to contend with. Mrs. Barber was perpetually coming to Viola with discomposing stories about the household affairs—stories always given in the most majestic language, which, like all other luxuries, had to be paid for; and Mrs. Barber's language was paid for ruinously in that commodity of undetermined value that we call "time."

Instead of trying to set matters right, she talked about how

they went wrong; and the domestic machinery began to groan and creak unpleasantly. This did not tend to improve matters between husband and wife. Philip was not used to lying upon "crumpled rose-leaves;" and he frankly told his wife that if she could make herself neither agreeable nor useful, he really failed to see what she was there for.

"Not for my own pleasure, assuredly!" Viola had once been goaded into replying.

"I'll be damned if it's for *mine*, then!" cried Philip, with a snarl.

"Then let me go."

"Where to, may I ask?" Philip gave a loud laugh. He had a newspaper in his hand, and with insolent coolness he was reading at intervals.

"That does that matter, so long as I may but go."

He gave a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

"How difficult it is to make you realize your position," he said. Do you think that you have only yourself to consult? Let me remind you that you bear my name; that (to speak so that you can understand) it is branded upon you, and by that brand I can claim you and restrain you wherever you may be so long as you live. Now are matters clear to you?"

She turned very white, but answered, seemingly without emotion: "Quite clear; you hold over me a power of more than life and death. You can treat me as you choose; for open resistance (even if I could resort to it) would mean for me simply ruin. I am at your mercy. I think, however, that, in common fairness, all this ought to have been explained to me before I married."

"My dear," said Philip, "a man can get a woman to marry him on any terms. It is her own look-out if she doesn't know what marriage involves. She ought to find out; but do you suppose finding out would stop a woman from marrying? Not a bit of it; not if she found out that she would have to throw herself on her husband's funeral pyre, like an Indian widow. These are plain facts, my dear, and any woman of the world will tell you the same thing. Besides, who, pray, are you, to be discontented with what satisfies other women? I am tired of the subject. Be good enough to give a little attention to your household duties for the future, and spare me further mysteries."

Philip turned away and buried himself in the paper. For a moment Viola stood before him, hesitating as if she intended to say something more; but apparently changing her mind, she walked slowly away.

If Philip had brought all the powers of his mind to bear upon the subject for the next year, he would never have guessed the feeling that at once made his wife seek Mrs. Barber and consult with her seriously as to the means of effecting an improvement in the state of the domestic affairs.

It was the first time that the mistress of the house had

actively used her authority, and it greatly startled Mrs. Barber.

That high functionary of course thought that any suggested change was impossible; but in course of time she became convinced that it had to be made, and reluctantly set about effecting the task.

Philip some time later, noticing that his wishes had been carried out minutely, gave an approving nod to his wife, and remarked that he was glad to see that she had taken his advice to heart and turned over a new leaf.

"How shall I reward you for this sensible conduct, my dear!"

"I want no reward, thank you; I am glad you are pleased."

"What *do* you want, then?" demanded Philip, with a frown.

"Nothing."

"So be it. I had a little present I was going to give you—a present that would make the eyes of most wives glisten; but since you want nothing, you shall have nothing."

He put back the red leather case, which he had brought out of his pocket, and went on with his breakfast.

"If you would condescend to ask me for this confounded trinket, and take a little interest in it, I would give it you even now," said Philip, after a long silence. "I am not a bear or a tyrant, whatever you may say."

"I never said you were either."

"Well, will you ask me for this thing?"

"I cannot accept it as a reward for anything I may have done that pleases you," said Viola, flushing.

"What a mad-woman you are! And, pray, why not?"

"I have only done what I thought myself bound in duty to do."

"But if I choose to show that I am pleased with you——"

Viola shook her head.

"As a reward, I cannot accept it!" she repeated.

"Idiot!"

Philip took the case again out of his pocket, opened it and laid it on the table. It contained a star of magnificent brilliants, gleaming and scintillating upon their bed of sapphire velvet. He watched her face.

"Do you like it?"

"It is lovely!"

"Do you wish to have it?"

She shook her head.

"And what if I say that you *must* have it?"

"You have already clearly explained to me that I have no choice but to obey you; moreover, it has always been my desire to obey you to the best of my ability."

"Very well; then take it and wear it, if you please."

He handed her the case, which she took.

"I am tired of this sort of thing, let me tell you, Viola," he went on. "It is time that you should clearly understand your position as my wife; and then perhaps you will see that your best policy is conciliation, not defiance."

"I have never been defiant."

"You have certainly never been conciliating!" he exclaimed. "A woman can generally get her own way with a man (within limits), if she knows how to manage. You are not half clever."

Viola gave a wintry little smile and a faint shrug of the shoulders.

"Now, you understand that I want you to *wear* that star. I don't give it you to be locked away in some old drawer and never seen. It would look well in your hair."

"I will do what you wish," she said.

Philip made an impatient movement.

"*I* don't understand you," he exclaimed. "You are as pig-headed——"

Viola looked up.

"You talk about making me understand my position," she said, "but it seems to me that I understand it very well. I am (in your own words) branded with your name. It gives you a claim over me so long as I live. I understand that quite clearly. If I were to leave you, you could make life impossible to me. I have no more illusions. I see and understand. It is just because I *do* see and understand that I offend you. You would have me act two parts at the same time. That cannot be, even at *your* command. You are my husband—you married me in the face of my repeated assurance that I did not wish to marry you—you have thus become my master, and, if you choose, my tyrant. I am at your mercy. In these circumstances how can you expect from me anything except deference and obedience? If you are my master, now and for ever, you cannot hope to establish any other relation between us. You take your stand on your authority, and there you must remain."

Philip rose slowly and went to the fireplace. "It may surprise you to learn that you talk damned nonsense, my dear," he said in his suavest tones.

"Then perhaps I had better hold my tongue," she answered quietly.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"It is to be hoped that you will have children," he said with an intonation that made her shrink as if she had been touched with a hot iron. "*They* would soon bring you to your senses."

"Do you find you are generally able to foretell how circumstances will affect me?" she asked coldly.

"I have some knowledge of human nature," he replied; "and I have kept my eyes open. A married woman who has no children may give her husband a little trouble; but the

first baby infallibly drives the nonsense out of her. After that, the game is in his hands. She has got to behave rationally for the child's sake."

Philip gave a slight smile as he said it, which was subtly, profoundly wounding.

"If you are determined to deprive me of every grain of self-esteem, if you are resolved to humiliate me to the very dust," said Viola, in a low voice full of suppressed passion, "it may please you to know that I recognise my utter helplessness to resist you even in *that*. While my mother is alive——" She stopped abruptly.

"While your mother is alive, you are afraid to make a scandal in her respectable family!" said Philip. "Very right and very wise, my dear. I drink to your respected mother's very good health, and may her days be long in the land!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WEST WING.

A LARGE portion of Upton Castle had remained uninhabited. Sir Philip made various jocular allusions to the size of the family which might find accommodation in the great deserted rooms of the west wing. Upton generally made one joke last a long time, and the prudent village also took care that it should not be of a recondite or impersonal character: *that* might cause an epidemic of headache. A pleasantry that required one to think, was as bad as a play that made demands on one's pocket-handkerchief.

Of course Viola was not allowed to miss the sweet savour of the Upton joke. Philip repeated it to her with an insolent laugh, and added one or two apposite remarks, which Viola would willingly have burnt out of her brain with hot irons, so that their imprint might be eternally erased.

That vast deserted wing over which Upton made merry had become Viola's favourite haunt, in the winter afternoons, when the closing in of the light made work or reading impossible, and the stillness of the dusk creeping over the sea brought a tired lull to the sense of unappeasable misery.

The left wing was nearest to the ruin, and from the windows of its vast old rooms one could look almost into the keep, where Viola often used to see Caleb working before his doorstep, until the darkness crept up and forced him to desist.

Sometimes she would go out and have a talk with him, which she always found a great relief, for Caleb could arrest her own painful thoughts and carry her away into his cold,

clear, sorrowless world of "pure reason." But often Viola was too wretched to seek this respite; the solitude which was driving her troubles deeper and deeper into her soul became daily more and more of a necessity. She shrank at the approach of her fellow-creatures, from whom something hurtful, foolish, detestable, might, it seemed, always be expected. Like some animal accustomed to rough handling, she flinched even when no blow was intended.

The old rooms of the west wing were dark and dim, as if with the shadows of many years. They seemed to Viola to conceal a haunting danger, an unknown mysterious danger, hanging like a curse over the house. No one knew of her visits to this region of silence and shadows; she was supposed by the household to have gone out with Triton, or perhaps with Dorothy Evans, who sometimes accompanied her on her interminable rambles.

She kept her secret jealously, stealing in unobserved by the door leading onto the terrace, and up the great staircase, till she found herself safe and alone in the long corridors, out of which opened the innumerable musty-smelling rooms.

She scarcely dared to breathe as she moved with careful footsteps over the oaken floors, half expecting to see some form emerge from the gathering shadows, or rise up as she passed from the great four-post bedsteads, whose dark canopies must be embellished, as she fancied, with phantasmagoria of human dreams.

Among the old rooms was one called the death-chamber, which especially fascinated her. Here, generation after generation, the Dendraiths had died—sometimes calmly in the shadows of the great black bedstead, occasionally by violence.

In examining a fantastically carved cabinet which stood near the mantelpiece Viola discovered a number of old letters written in the last century, by the unhappy lady whose story Philip had told on that fatal day long ago. Many other musty treasures came to light,—a bit of faded ribbon; a silver thimble; and a piece of dim silken embroidery, with one of its miraculous flowers of unknown genus half finished, the threaded needle stuck into the silk, as if the work had been just laid down.

What were the fifty or a hundred years that had passed since the skilful fingers touched that dainty piece of embroidery? A mere fiction, an unreality.

The two realities—the life of that by-gone lady and that of her not less unhappy successor—seemed to annihilate between them the empty phantom time, and to touch each other closely. The little relics of everyday occupations which had lain here undisturbed since their owner passed away spoke of her so loudly that Viola felt as if she had known the woman who had slept and dreamt and, alas! wept in this old room, who had woven her sorrows into silken devices, and

died with the grief still in her soul—the embroidered flower of Paradise still uncompleted.

Viola took possession of the key of this cabinet, and mastered the secret of the hiding-place of the treasures.

On one windy afternoon in the twilight she stole up to the old room, taking with her a small narrow packet. She went first to the window and looked out. The waves were rolling one after the other over the expanse of grey waters, ocean's battalions making fierce onslaught against the shore. How calm, how beneficent, these same waters had looked on a certain summer afternoon,—that afternoon when she might have averted her fate had she been willing to fling off the claims of conscience! Could it be that she regretted having done her duty? She leant her head desolately against the window-sill. Adrienne had spoken of the quiet joy and satisfaction that follows duty performed, but Viola felt nothing but a passionate misery, to which she saw no possible end. Even if release came to-morrow, she felt that her soul was seared and branded for life, and that there was nothing left for her but to die. Never had she since her childhood been hopeful or light-hearted; now it was impossible to expect relief.

There were no stores of garnered joy to fall back upon in her trouble. This was like a sudden savage tightening of a cord that for years had been cutting into the flesh, wearing away the powers of rebound and the powers of enjoyment, just at the time when these should have been growing and accumulating.

Mrs. Sedley's long life of persistent self-neglect and self-deterioration was bearing its fruit, twenty and a hundred fold; the punishment, when it came, was heavy, and it fell on innocent shoulders.

Viola remained at the window watching the waves as they rolled over, melancholy, dreary, unceasing, Such were the movements of human destiny; the restless labour without aim or hope; a weary response to the perpetual stimulus of a blind necessity.

What did these everlasting waves achieve, as they rose and sank and rose again, expending their force merely upon their own birth element, effecting nothing? Caleb Foster said that in the course of ages they wore away the land by their ceaseless fretting, and added thus a few miles to the dominion of the ocean.

Perhaps the human waves were also wearing something away with their repeated onslaughts, adding thus to the dominion of—what? *That* was the awful question. And in any case, was it worth while?

Another dangerous thought came: what if all that we are told about Providence be the offspring of human imagination, part of our blind response to the goad that drives us all to live and think and feel and strive till the breath goes from us and the life-fever is stilled? Oh! what would her mother say

to such wild questions? What would even Adrienne say? Viola felt as if she had been sinking deeper and deeper into some black nightmare gulf, whence there was no returning: an antechamber leading by a long, narrowing passage to the regions of the damned.

She looked round her at the sinister dusk gathering and thickening in the corners of the silent room, at the vast oak bedstead and the carved cabinet with its grinning faces. She touched the packet she held in her hand with a singular gesture, and stood looking down at it steadily. A wave of colour spread over her face, and her eyes lighted up. She drew away the paper wrappings and disclosed the knife which Harry Lancaster had given her on her wedding-day, and her husband had forbidden her to keep. Evidently in this one particular she had failed in obedience. She looked at the ornament attentively, examined it this side and that, and ran her finger along the steel.

Viola thought of Harry's impassioned words of warning before her marriage, and it occurred to her, swiftly in passing, that he might have given her the thing not quite without a purpose! But the idea was dismissed as preposterous.

Harry! How suddenly he had vanished into the great silence which engulfs so many who seem to have made themselves part and parcel of our lives! Where was he? What was he doing and thinking? Scarcely a word of his had been forgotten. He had succeeded in weaving himself into Viola's memories, as the by-gone Lady Dendraith had woven her troubles into her silken impossible flowers. And he, too, had left the threaded needle sticking in the silk, and gone away and left the work unfinished.

Did he ever think of her now? Did he still——? Viola frowned and hurried away from the window, trying to banish that question from her mind. Did he love her still? Of course not; of course not—she was no longer free; he had ceased loving her as soon as she became Philip's wife. Harry would not be so wicked as to let his passion cross the adamantine marriage boundary. No; she must go through the world without his love, as she had elected to do; it was the maddest folly to permit her thoughts to wander back to the old times which could never be recalled. She wondered how she would feel if Harry were to walk into the room at this moment.

Her heart beat fast at the thought, and then faster as she discovered how much it had moved her. She was alarmed. Of all forms of sin, that of loving one man while married to another had seemed to Viola the farthest removed from the sphere of possibility; she had always turned from the idea with disgust and horror. And now——! Now she could at least guess how such dreadful things *might* occur, and what a weight of guilt and misery the wretched woman must carry

at her heart until the sin was expiated by some frightful suffering, or cast out by the grace of Heaven.

Restlessly the lonely figure began to pace the room up and down, up and down; the knife still in her hand.

"Surely he will not find it here," she muttered half aloud, going over to the cabinet, and opening the drawer containing the letters and embroidery. Taking the knife in both hands, she laid its point for a moment against her breast, pressing the handle a little. She let it rest there for a moment, as if questioning her ability to press it still further, should conscience permit. She was about to place it beside the other treasures, when a sound through the dusk made all the blood rush to her heart.

She looked round in terror, but could see nothing. Her impulse was to get out of the room as quickly as she could, but the dared not move. Some terrible shape, she felt sure, would meet her from every darkened corner; and as she passed the bed, a figure would rise up out of its shadows and clutch her. Oh, to be out of this awful room!

She braced herself for a great effort. The whole width of the room had to be crossed; the door was at the farthest corner; the bed occupied the middle of the wall, opposite the window, and must be passed in order to reach the door.

She set her teeth and moved forward, approaching the great bedstead, and instinctively quickening her footsteps. Thank Heaven! In another second the ordeal would be over. But oh! if the door did not open quickly, she thought she would go mad! Now for it! Her eyes were fixed in fascinated horror on the bed as she prepared to make a rush. She had taken two steps forward, when suddenly she staggered back with a sick gasp; for out of the shadows of that bedstead, as she approached—merciful Heaven! it was no fancy, but a ghostly fact!—a figure *did* rise up, and a pair of arms *did* stretch out to clutch her! Viola uttered a shriek of terror.

She saw something dark standing above her, a white face, and two white hands approaching. She tottered back, struggling blindly towards the window, ready to tear it open and fling herself out; then her power of movement failed her as in a nightmare, and the room swam round. She felt the white hands on her neck, the dark arms close round her, and then something within her brain seemed to give way; she knew no more.

When she awoke to consciousness, the canopy of the carved bedstead was above her head and she was on it, weak and helpess.

She could see the demon faces of its carvings by the light of a flickering candle which stood on the cabinet.

"Do you feel better now?"

Viola started and trembled. It was Philip's voice.

"Yes."

"Hold your tongue then and take this." He gave her some

brandy, then let her lie quiet for ten minutes. At the end of that time he came to the bedside. "You are easier to frighten than I thought," he said, moistening her forehead with *eau-de-cologne*. I think you might have stopped to think for a moment, before you fainted. You surely don't suppose that I didn't know of your frequent visits to this Bluebeard Chamber."

"You knew?" repeated Viola.

"Naturally I knew. I thought you were coming too often, and began to suspect something was up—secret assignations, for all I knew; so I concluded it was time to reconnoitre. I reconnoitred from the convenient depths of my great-grandmother's four-poster. I didn't mean to give you such a fright, though—how you did shriek!" Philip laughed at the remembrance. "But I confess I thought a little start might be salutary. It's uncanny to have a wife who spends hours in disused rooms, looking as if she were going to commit suicide from an upper window. Not that I am afraid of her ending her days in that fashion. It pleases young minds of a certain order to dally with such ideas, but they seldom come to business. I don't expect to be a widower yet awhile, my dear."

Philip smiled urbanely as he bent over the figure of his wife, whose closed eyelids and exhausted attitude pleaded vainly for a moment's respite from his sneers.

He thought she was shamming, or at least yielding unnecessarily to the effects of the shock.

"You would like to know, perhaps, how I became acquainted with your visits here. In a very simple way. Caleb Foster had seen you at the window, and without knowing that he was betraying a secret, happened to mention the fact to me. As there is a staircase leading from this room to the terrace, I thought perhaps you were making ingenious use of it, for romantic purposes of your own. Women with a Puritanical training are generally the most enterprising when they get the chance."

Viola raised herself for a moment. but her strength failed her, and she sank back exhausted, the angry tears, to her intense disgust, welling up into her eyes. She hid away her face that Philip might not see them. But he was not to be deceived.

"Oh! if you are going to resort to weeping I have no more to say. You had better let me take you to your own room, and I can send Mrs. Barber or the maid to you. I daresay women know better the etiquette in such matters than I do."

"I can walk," said Viola, as he began to lift her from the bed.

"Try," he said.

She managed to totter a few steps towards the door. Philip lifted her in his arms. "You can leave me here and send Mrs. Barber to me," she said; "put me down."

"Nonsense! I shall take you to your room."

"I would much prefer to stay here. Philip, put me down," she repeated sharply, struggling to get free. But he paid not the slighest attention.

She was carried down the long empty corridors to her room. As he laid her on her bed, he bent down over her, his arms still round her, as if enjoying the sense of her helplessness and his power. He was smiling into her face.

"Now," he said, "for the ministering angels and sal volatile. I think this afternoon may be an instructive one for you, my dear. You may observe that your doings are not secret from me. I have ways and means of finding out everything I want to know. It would take a much subtler person than you are to baffle me, and one who is rather more of an adept at telling lies. Let me advise you, for your good, to be open with me. It is your best policy. You have plenty of opportunities if you would only use them to your own advantage. I am quite open to woman's wiles, my dear, if you did but know it." He gave her a little careless insolent caress, and walked off smiling.

"If you only knew how I *hate* you!" Viola exclaimed, with a sob of passion.

"My dear, I know it quite well. People generally hate their masters, if they are mad enough to oppose them. Again I say, in all good fellowship, try the other policy!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIBELLA.

VIOLA was seriously shaken by the shock which she had sustained on that afternoon in the West Wing. She shrank from going about alone, especially after dusk, and merely to look at the window of that dreadful room from outside would make her turn cold in full noontide.

"Dorothy, I wish you would introduce me to some of your villagers; my life is so utterly useless that I think I am reaping the punishment of all cumberers of the ground: my own society is becoming unbearable to me."

Dorothy, though much surprised, gladly did as she was asked, but added that really there were not enough poor people at Upton to supply the needs of the already existing district-visitors.

In spite of disappointments and difficulties Viola made a determined effort to lay the energies of her wounded soul at the feet of fellow-sufferers.

She was coming back from a round of visits at Upton one afternoon, feeling sad and disheartened; it was late, and she

felt a nervous dread of being alone in that house for two hours at dusk. She decided to take a round so as to make the time of solitude shorter. Home was becoming almost intolerable to her, and the strain of mind and nerve had begun to show only too clearly in her face.

Viola bent her footsteps towards the sea. Arrived at the cliff's edge, she paused and peered over.

A man was standing at the beach, throwing stones into the water. If only it were Caleb! A good wholesome talk with that amiable encyclopædia would be like a tonic to the overwrought brain.

It must be Caleb; who else would be on the shore at this time?

Viola determined to descend. The way was steep, but not difficult to one who knew the windings of the path. She lost sight of the figure on the beach, and when she arrived there, somewhat breathless, he was far away in the distance, looking very small and very dim. She broke into a run, but on coming closer, she began to feel doubtful whether it *were* Caleb after all.

The sea ran heavily and hungrily upon the beach, dragging the stones back and forward with each pulse-beat. Viola continued her reasonless pursuit. The power that drew her on seemed irresistible.

Suddenly the man, who had been walking at a brisk pace, came to a standstill, and looked up towards a pathway that led from the beach to a little wind-shorn wood nestling in a hollow of the downs. From the heart of the wood a tiny column of blue smoke rose out of shelter to be buffeted by a boisterous sea-breeze, and driven inland.

Viola paused with beating heart, still instinctively keeping out of sight. A strange idea had taken possession of her that this man was *Harry Lancaster!*

She started violently, and shrank back into the fissure where she had concealed herself; for her suspicion was confirmed. Her heart gave an excited bound and then seemed to stand still altogether. She watched his movements breathlessly. After looking up to the little wood for some seconds Harry turned away and walked to the verge of the sea. Viola could hear the great stones crunching under his footsteps as he plunged across them.

He stood and watched the waves rolling up, and the hissing back-rush of the water over the small pebbles. Occasionally he would turn and take another expectant look at the pathway, but ten minutes passed, and nobody appeared.

For whom was he waiting?

The tide had just turned, and every seventh wave brought the line of wetted pebbles further towards the cliff, causing Harry to step back gradually in the same direction. He came at last within a dozen yards of Viola's hiding-place. Yes; there was no mistaking that upright soldier-like figure,

that peculiar pose of the head. There was a very sombre expression in his face; the lips were set and hard, as if their owner suffered pain.

The temptation to reveal her presence was very strong, but Viola, resisting it, held her breath lest she should betray herself. Interest, yearning for sympathy, dramatic curiosity, all battled with the nervous horror of being discovered.

Finally, conscience, as usual, turned the scale.

Then came a scorching thought! Fir Dell lay among the trees just up here; could Harry be waiting for Mrs. Lincoln? It seemed impossible—Mrs. Lincoln—a married woman, and not a good one! No; Harry was not that kind of man. His character was too deep for such mockery of true love. Then came a chilling consciousness that what was unforgiveable in a woman, a man might do without ceasing to respect himself or to command the respect of others. Whatever he might do or feel, however, Viola was sure that she ought to avoid him. Since the line where sin begins and innocence ends did not coincide in the two cases, her own *rôle* in the event of a meeting might prove beyond her powers. It would be like a game where one player was bound by the rules and the other was not.

Again Harry turned to look at the pathway from the wood, and this time he hurried forward, raising his hat with a relieved smile.

"I feared you were not coming!" he said.

"I very nearly did not come," a voice singularly soft and rich returned, a woman's voice implying many things, as voices do.

Viola drew in her breath, too excited and bewildered to realise that she had now assumed the part of eavesdropper.

"Max Hoffmann and his followers have just left me," the voice continued, "or I should have been here before. Not been waiting long, I hope?" She gave him another hearty shake of the hand. "How nice it is to meet again after all this time! I can see you have a great deal to tell me if you choose." She looked anxiously and affectionately in his face.

"You are right," he said; "you always know, Sibella."

By this time the two figures had moved a little and were walking forward side by side along the shore.

Viola saw a graceful form clad from head to foot in rich dark red. Against the grey of the sea and sky and the white cliffs that touch of warm colour was most cheering. Instinctively Viola glanced at her own lady-like gown of nondescript tint, and was dimly conscious that the difference of attire indicated some radical difference of temperament.

Firm and fearless was this woman's gait, and the same spirit showed in the upright pose of the head. It was scarcely possible in the dusk to discern the features, but they appeared to be regular. The hair and eyes were dark, and with the red cloak and little cloth cap gave the wearer a rather gipsy-

like appearance. Her vivacity of manner supported this effect.

During the few seconds in which all this had passed, Viola stood perfectly motionless in her hiding-place. She was scarcely capable of movement, for there was a strong paralysing pain at her heart. It was not figurative or poetical; it was an actual physical pain, as if the stream of life, being blocked up, were struggling in vain for outlet.

"Harry, you don't look well! What is troubling you?"

"More things than one; but I want to hear about you. Tell me everything. You have haunted my thoughts as usual, Sibella. I don't like these long partings!"

"Nor I," she said; "but life is full of partings—perhaps in preparation for the last and the longest one of all. What was that?" She paused suddenly. "Did you not hear a sound of footsteps over the stones?"

Harry shook his head.

"Surely. Ah! yes, I see a figure running along by the foot of the cliff! There, like a moving shadow against the white!"

Harry also could see something that might be a figure.

"We must have been seen and overheard," he said.

"The good people of Upton take a more than Christian interest in their neighbours," observed Sibella with a laugh.

"Confound them!" Harry exclaimed. "Well, I hope our eavesdropper was interested."

"*I* hope that she may catch cold," said Sibella.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSPIRACY.

As the afternoon went on the wind began to rise, and the sea became perturbed as if with premonition of storm.

Sibella shivered.

"It is going to be a wild night," she said. "Do you hear that ominous muttering in the sound of the sea, not loud, but deep and malignant? The wind is very keen and angry," she continued, as Harry did not answer; "let us go home. I should like to show you my little house in the wood; it is so pretty and cosy."

They walked on quickly together.

"Harry, I have often wished that your sister would come and see me; but of course she won't."

"I fear not," said Harry, with a shake of the head. "'A mad world, Horatio!' Adrienne," he continued, "is a woman

to go through fire and water at the call of duty? She has a theory ready-made to fit anything that happens, so that she and Fate stand obstinately confronted: they devour each other, tails and all; while Adrienne, gradually diminishing, still cries out, 'Uncomfortable, but for the best.'"

Sibella smiled.

"What hope have I of indulgence from such a woman? Or what hope has she," said Harry, "of evading her own theories? She belongs to that vast band who suffer from what I call the disease of words; who are eaten up by words, as some wretched animal is devoured by parasites. Adrienne pronounces to herself (for instance) the word 'duty' or 'right,' and lets it fasten upon her soul and feed there as a leech."

"Is it curable?" asked Sibella.

"Not when it is far gone."

"Your sister?"

"Half her substance is already gone. Speak to her out of the fulness of the heart, and she baulks you with a *word*. Try to vault over it, and you leave her far behind on the other side; she sits upon the partition and shakes her head, and perhaps sighs. And that ends everything."

Sibella laughed a little sadly.

"And the word that partitions us, she and I, is—*respectability*. And I used to be *so* respectable!—there was really something extra superfine about my respectability if she only knew it; it was a respectability as of the Medes and Persians!"

"Foreign virtue," said Harry, "is unsatisfactory to the truly British mind."

"Say instinct," she suggested. "British mind is a phrase that seems to me too enterprising."

"I think you are pretty well," he observed; "you don't run amuck in this way unless you have some surplus energy; you are only Quixotic when in good health."

"I haven't been laughed at since I saw you last, except behind my back. It is quite refreshing! No, I am not well, however, in spite of my energy; and I have been very ill indeed in the summer."

"And you never told me!" Harry exclaimed reproachfully. "It was cruel to keep me in ignorance."

"Well, well, perhaps I won't next time. No, I would rather not talk about it now; it's a miserable subject. I thought I was going to die quite alone, without a word of farewell to any one, and——"

"Sibella!"

"Don't look so horrified; it is over; peace be to the past. Come back and see my home. Why do I keep you shivering here? And we can talk out our arrears by my study fire; such a dear little room, Harry, looking onto the sea, with a group of sighing pine-trees for the foreground."

She led the way up the path by which she had descended to the beach, and the talk drifted on till they reached the house. A brown dog ran out to meet them, welcoming his mistress with a yelp of joy.

"You see I have the dear old fellow yet," said Sibella; "but he is getting very infirm. What a sad cruel world it is!"

Sibella led the way into a pleasant little room, where tea and toast and a friendly kettle awaited their coming.

Books and work lay about, and there were sundry antique vases and glass bottles of strange shapes.

"I see you still have your prehistoric things in bronze," said Harry, standing by the fireplace while Sibella made the tea.

"What should I be without my *mementi mori*? I think of the fellow-man who fashioned these images, and I know that all is vanity."

"Tea is not vanity," said Harry; "tea is an eternal verity. I am sure Carlyle would admit that."

"In one of his paroxysms of silence," added Sibella fantastically.

"Sugar?" she inquired.

"You have forgotten!"

"Sugar it must be, and many lumps," she said; "he that takes no sugar, secure in the consciousness of innocence, says so boldly and at once."

"You have not asked me yet to do so, but I think I will sit down," said Harry.

Sibella laughed and pushed up a low chair before the fire.

"Now, are the conditions of masculine amiability fulfilled? Stay! Buttered toast! Some men become fascinating after buttered toast, though it is more generally indicated in the case of maiden ladies not without cats."

"Oh, please don't do that!" Harry exclaimed, bending down to take the slice of bread which she was toasting. "You will be roasted alive. I want no buttered toast."

"But I want you to be amiable—go away, let me alone; I am happier than I have been for many a long day. It is the old instinct sprouting up again, of the woman to wait upon the man. That happens—a reversion to some hereditary instinct—to all of us. Hence our inconsistencies, which people throw in our teeth. Ah, the bread begins to steam, and to emit sweet odours. This, let me remark suggestively, is the stage at which the flush of dawning amiability usually begins to appear—in an average patient."

Sibella's was one of those faces which indicate the high-water mark of human development. Thus far has man gone upon the path of progress; thus far is he removed from the animal. Still, it was not the face of a saint; for that, the smile was too brilliant and sometimes too mocking.

"Why do you talk of everything but yourself, Sibella?"

asked Harry. "I want to know how you like Upton, what you are doing, and whether you know anyone here."

"I like Upton exceedingly," she said; "the neighbourhood is charming, and the sea—ah, the sea—that goes to my very heart! But it is very tragic; there is something tragic in the air of this place. I never felt anything before to equal it. It quite depresses me sometimes."

"You are as impressionable as ever," said Harry. He seemed about to say more, but hesitated.

"Do you ever see Philip Dendraith now?" he asked at length.

"Oh! yes, he comes pretty often."

"I want to interest you about his wife," said Harry. "I told you how I tried to save her from the marriage, and how I failed. She knows nothing of the world, she is extremely sensitive; judge for yourself whether she is happy."

Sibella had risen and walked to the window.

"It seems almost as if this deadly oppression in the air of this place had not been without meaning. I wonder if the trouble of this girl could in any way have communicated itself to me."

"I think it is more than probable," Harry returned. "Sibella, I have roused your sympathy; but I want more—I want your help."

"My help! what can I do?

"I don't know, but I want you to watch your opportunity. What you mean to do, you can do."

She gave a dissenting gesture.

"How one must pay for one's victories!"

"Yes, we must pay for being stronger than one's neighbours," said Harry.

She gave a long sigh. "One beats one's way against wind and tide; not for a moment daring to relax lest the current sweep back upon the hard-won way. At last, after a hard fight, a little temporary shelter offers itself for a moment's breathing-space. Then come the friends crowding round, congratulating: 'How well you are placed! what a charming and convenient spot! the shade, how grateful! the sun, how warm! truly, Fortune smiles upon you!' What you win with your heart's blood is counted to the gods."

"If you are tired out, I have no more to say," Harry rejoined, rising and going to the fire.

"Go on," she said; "I speak one way and act another. You know me."

"I know that when people have had to fight and to suffer, they do one of two things—either they develop the instinct to push others back as they have been pushed back themselves, or they become eager to rescue and to warn. I thought that you would belong to the second class."

"You always think over-highly of me; and at one time—well, I was nearer to deserving it than I am now. I fear I

have lost hope. The misery of people overwhelms me, sickens me. How can one rescue individuals who expiate the sins, against reason, of the forefathers of the race? It is all written in the book of Doom."

"That is fatalism," said Harry.

Sibella paused and her eyes wandered out to the mournful fir-trees, themselves like Fates standing dominant over the fast-fading scene.

"A woman brought up in such a way as to make her at once intensely sensitive and intensely conscientious is a ready-made martyr; nothing can save her. She is predestined."

Harry bent down and stirred the fire with vicious vehemence.

"I think women like Mrs. Sedley ought to be——" He smashed a large piece of coal into splinters by way of finish to the sentence.

"You ask me to help this girl?" Sibella continued; "why not suggest that I should forbid to-morrow's dawn? The whole machinery of doom is in motion; can I stop it?

Harry felt himself grow cold.

"She is a woman; she is human," he said.

"She is the child of her generation," returned Sibella. Conscience is the most tenacious of human attributes, provided it has its root in prejudice. You can deliver a prisoner who will run when the gates are open, but what can you do with one who draws the bolts and turns the locks against his would-be saviour?"

"If you will not help her, she has no helper upon this earth!" Harry exclaimed.

"I thought your sister was her friend?"

"My sister!" he cried impatiently. "She only cheers on the victim; feeds her on a soft, warm, spongy sort of doctrine perfectly ruinous to one of her temperament."

"Are you unable to help her yourself, since you believe in the possibility of rescue?"

Harry passed his hands through his hair, with a gesture of desperation.

"Her husband hates me and suspects me; I could not go to his house. Before their marriage I was his rival, his determined and obstinate rival. I thought on that day of the wedding, when I saw her standing there by his side, as if I must either break in between them and tear her away or go mad on the spot. I did neither, of course. I am capable of killing that man if I saw him ill-treat her." He bent his head, buried in his hands, upon the table. "I would die for her; I would commit a crime for her;—what do I care?" he went on excitedly. "Her eyes haunt me day and night. I am desperate! If only she would listen to me—if only she would leave him and come with me! We could do it if only she would!"

Sibella looked at him with pity in her eyes.

"I know what you are thinking, though you don't say it," he cried, "that still her fate would pursue her, making happiness impossible, because of the eternal visitations of remorse. Yes, and I know it is damnably true. The curse is upon us to the end."

Sibella laid her hand tenderly on his arm, but made no immediate reply.

A strong gust of wind that went sobbing round the house seemed like the wild and grimly sincere answer of the elements.

She had said that she believed in Fate, and her belief was strengthened as she stood mournfully by the side of the man who had been to her for the best years of her life a devoted and unswerving friend. What could she do to unravel this Gordian knot, tied and drawn tight by the force of generations and the weight of centuries?

Perhaps the wild melancholy in the sound of wind and wave, the dark loneliness of the swaying pine-trees, uttered gloomy prophecies, and forbade the rising of the star of hope. Her knowledge of the force of emotion in this man made her tremble the more.

"To have the capacity for extreme suffering in this best of all possible worlds," she said bitterly to herself, "is to attract it." She paused, deeply considering; then she touched him on the shoulder quietly: "Harry, I will do what I can."

He stretched out his hand and pressed hers without speaking.

The silence continued for some minutes; the wind cannonading outside, and tearing and snarling in savage temper at every victim branch exposed by ill-luck to its fury.

Sibella gave an excited shiver. From familiar association some favourite lines ran in fragmentary snatches athwart her hastening thoughts.

> "Pain, ah! eternal Pain!
> I hear Æolian harpings wail and die
> Down forest glades, and through the hearts of men,
> Pain, pain, eternal pain!"

She rose and walked restlessly to the window, and then back to the fire.

"O Harry! why are you not a man of faint desires or half-developed nerves? Why are you not wise with the wisdom of the world, taking things as you find them?"

"I suppose our nature is on Fate, and can't be evaded," said Harry.

"Then pray for a new nature," cried Sibella. "The gods are cheats! What is the use of giving us a commanding watchword, an 'open sesame,' at which all doors fly back, if the eternal hunger is to be awakened by the splendour of our visions? Every human possibility is flung recklessly at our feet—just to show us that there is a green land and fair cities beyond the desert—the desert which we can never cross!"

There was a loud ring at the bell. Harry sprang up.

"A visitor on such a night! I will go."

"No," said Sibella hastily. "You may get indirect help or information; one must not neglect such chances. Stay, and keep your ears open."

The door was thrown back, and the maid announced: "Mr. Dendraith."

One glance passed between Sibella and Harry, and then she went quickly forward.

"How good of you to come on this wild evening, Mr. Dendraith! You are indeed a chevalier *sans peur*——"

"Don't stop abruptly, Mrs. Lincoln!" exclaimed Philip.

"Oh! no man wants to be *sans reproche* in the present day—it is not good form. Do sit down and warm yourself. You know Mr. Lancaster, of course? He too has come against wind and tide to break my solitude."

"What! Lancaster!—didn't recognise you for the moment—a thousand pardons. When did you return to these delirious parts? I don't wonder you act the moth; our local lights are dangerously brilliant."

"Of course Mr. Lancaster has filial duties to perform at Upton."

"True," said Philip. "I hope you have found your mother and sister well."

"Pretty well," said Harry laconically.

"Making a long stay?" inquired Philip.

"That is undecided."

"I fear," said Philip, "that you are rather a rolling stone—no stability. There is nothing that gives more weight to the character than a permanent address."

"Weight, but not charm," put in Sibella; "for that one does not need the more solid virtues. Who ever loved a man for his punctuality, or his forethought, or his patience and perseverance?"

She had a bright flush on her cheeks, and Harry saw that she was talking at random, to keep the conversation going.

"I believe that Lord Chesterfield completely alienated the affections of his son, and that Madame de Sevigné made an enemy for life of her daughter."

"You seem to have made a judicious choice," she observed, smoothing out the folds of her dress.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"A wife who doesn't resent interference with her reading is a real treasure," said Sibella.

"She may resent it; but she has been well brought up." Philip gave a laugh. "In point of fact, I fancy she felt she was devouring forbidden fruit, for she gave such a start when I caught her at it."

"I should suppose she would require some sort of occupation," said Sibella. "Life can scarcely run on greased wheels anywhere in this parish."

"She has the house to look after," said Philip, "and she is fond of her garden; and then there's calling and tennis, and don't women spend a lot of time in fancy needlework? She can have people to stay with her if she likes; but she is not sociable; she seems to prefer to be alone; and of course I don't want to insist in a matter of that kind. I am inclined to be easy-going, perhaps rather too much so."

"Perhaps," said Sibella, with downcast eyes.

"I must be going," said Harry abruptly. He would not be persuaded to wait for the rain to cease.

Sibella went with him to the front door.

"Come and see me to-morrow, if you can. I want to thrash the matter out with you. Keep a firm hold over yourself with—" she threw back her head towards the study; "don't let him guess that you are otherwise than indifferent. I can see he enjoys your suffering; this is an enemy that must be warily fought—he is keen and strong. Good-night, and good speed."

She hastened back to her guest.

"At last!" cried Philip.

"At last?" she repeated.

"At last I have you to myself!"

"As far as talking was concerned, I think you had that privilege from the beginning."

Philip smiled.

"Our friend was not so talkative as usual; he didn't quite appreciate my intrusion, I fancy."

She had established herself comfortably, with her feet on the fender, looking the picture of idleness. Now and then a little secret smile flitted across her face, as she listened to her companion's compliments. Philip drew his own chair closer to the fire, as he was bidden, keeping a pair of searching and admiring eyes fixed upon Sibella's face. He wished to find out whether he had made any serious impression upon her, of any sort or kind; whether he sufficiently interested her to remain in her thoughts after he left. This was always the unsolved question in his mind.

"I wonder sometimes," Philip said, drawing his chair a little closer—"I wonder what Upton would be like if you were to leave it?"

Sibella's head bent lower for a moment, and Philip saw a smile spreading over her face.

"I really don't think it would be endurable!" he added in a low voice.

"The value of property would go down," she remarked.

"Oh! but I mean seriously."

"So do I—very seriously."

"Mrs. Lincoln, you know well how dependent I am upon you for——"

"Amusement," she said. "Yes, I know it well; I study up old Punches so that you may not come to me in vain."

"I come to you for something more than this—"

He watched her face keenly for something that might encourage him to go on, but the motionless attitude, lowered eyes, and the slight smiles—like wandering fires, playing round her lips,—told him nothing.

He was too wary to venture more. He knew that he had expressed his meaning, but not so definitely that she could openly resent it, if her mind lay toward resentment.

There was a long pause.

"The elements are conspiring in my favour," said Philip, when presently a heavy gust shook the window. "My visit is long beyond all hope of indulgence, but of course there is the storm. Were it *between* instead of around us, I should treat it with little respect."

"You seem to confound me and the storm in your imagination," said Sibella, looking up for a minute.

"Ah! how can you say that? Have I not waited long enough? Have I not obeyed your merest hint and wish? Have I not again and again been silent when I longed to speak?"

She gave a little shudder.

"We will not pursue this subject," she said. "There are things which appear to us under aspects so different that we have no common language in which to discuss them. In so far as you mean and feel disrespect, I bitterly resent every word you have uttered. Don't protest. You are a man of the world, and think of these things as men of the world think of them. That is enough for me. You don't understand? No, and you can't."

Philip frowned.

"I must have further explanation; it is my right."

She shook her head. He came towards her eagerly. The excitement of the experiment was near to carrying him away, cool-headed as he was.

She broke out into a laugh.

She too had been trying an experiment, and the result entertained her.

Philip looked angry. He felt that he had made a miscalculation; the affair had drifted on to a wrong footing—drifted? Had it not been skilfully guided by Sibella, whose will quietly and subtly opposed his, deliberately blunting the point of the episode to which he had been leading up?

He was puzzled and amazed.

"It's that fool Lancaster!"

He felt too angry to stay longer, especially as Sibella was looking exasperatingly amiable.

"I fear I have outstayed my welcome," he said, taking her hand; "perhaps some other day, when you have not had a more attractive visitor, you may treat my poor feelings with less disdain."

She laughed a little and said politely that she never treated

anybody's feelings with disdain, least of all Mr. Dendraith's.

"Oh, that's mere arabesque!" cried Philip; "I would prefer frank impoliteness."

"Only a bear could be impolite to a Lord Chesterfield!" was her parting remark.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HUMAN COMEDY.

THE elements had stormed themselves tired. With the dawn came a slowly growing peace, and the sun rose over a sea still perturbed, but with the movements of a past agitation, no longer with the riot of present passion.

All the changes of the night Viola could have described, detail by detail. She lay in the great carved bed listening to the roar of wind and wave, following with terrible wide-awake intentness every rise and fall in their voices, every shift from boom to shriek, from blasphemy to lamentation, as with a baffled drop the sea-gusts swerved from the Castle wall, and went searching and blustering among the trembling battlements. As the storm grew less violent, the wind seemed to be playing hide-and-seek through the windows—through that window where Philip had fallen so many years ago. It was always on these wild nights that the memory returned to haunt her most persistently, and to remind her of the wickedness that lay at the bottom of her heart, ready at any time to rise in volcanic rebellion against principle, against conscience, against all the faithful teachings of her childhood.

The discovery that she had made on the beach this afternoon was creating intolerable pain. Yet, what business had she to care about Harry Lancaster's love affairs?

But the pain throbbed on none the less, corroding with ruthless appetite. It seemed as if by morning her very heart must be eaten away; and then, thank Heaven! there would be nothing more to suffer!

In the bewilderment of stormy night-thoughts, she half believed that the dawn would really find her calm and insensible.

When the first signs of it crept about the room, she rose and looked out, leaving Philip safely asleep.

The sea was bleak and wan.

> "By the lone shore
> Mournfully beat the waves."

It was Sunday morning, promising well for a day of rest and a day of dulness.

Kneeling by the half-open window, her dark hair flowing about her with an abandonment that she never permitted to her own heart, Viola leant her head upon her hands and prayed. As her eyes fixed themselves upon the point in the grey sky where the flush of dawn had just appeared, there rose an unconcious worship in her soul for that coming sun, at whose glance the dead waters awoke rejoicing, crying aloud at the glory of their resurrection.

The scene was one of deep religious significance to Viola; her soul wrestled in prayer, soared in adoration to the God of Nature, whose works, so great and fraught with terror, were yet so marvellously beautiful.

Her own grief appeared not less bitter, but more bearable, since they were imposed by the hand of the All-powerful, who had promised to lead His obedient children safely through the darkest places, would they only have faith in Him. It was but for a little while, and then rest. Viola had been so often tempted to cry out in her misery, "Why *this* trial, of all others?" but to-day she thought she understood that it had been inflicted just because it alone seemed quite intolerable to her, because through it alone could her soul be purified in the agonising passage through fiery gulfs of humiliation. The shame of conscious sin was not spared her; she was doomed to look into her own soul and see there—struggle as she might—a guilty love for one who was not her husband, a man who had done his utmost to lead her away from the path of obedience, and who—God forgive him!—had made her waver in secret with the awful force of the temptation.

Perhaps the tempest that had raged within her all through the night had left her exhausted in mind and body, and therefore the more ready to be touched by the optimistic influences of sunrise over a calming sea. It seemed to her as a distinct message; the gentle yet spirited little waves, foam-crowned and tinged with the splendour of the morning, brought tidings of peace as they rolled in, each with a little sigh, upon the shore.

When at last Viola turned from the window, prepared to take up the burdens of the day, there was a look on her face such as is seen sometimes on the faces of the dying—very calm, beautiful, and unearthly.

Philip was in one of his most biting moods this morning: everything seemed to annoy him; every incident was the signal for a sneer, or for some remark that to Viola was worse than any sneer.

Cold-hearted people, with little ideality, are almost invariably coarse; and Philip's coarseness—though he knew how to conceal it when convenient—had attained a high stage of development. This morning, after various remarks that Viola felt on their way, and dreaded as if they were blows, Philip

fell to talking about Harry Lancaster. He alluded to his former conduct in no measured terms, and informed his wife that he had now turned up again and was philandering at the heels of Mrs. Lincoln, the improper but agreeable young person who had become tenant of Fir Dell.

It was well he had transferred his attentions to this lady, as Philip had no notion of having the fellow loafing about *this* place on any pretext.

"We shall probably be meeting him now and then at people's houses, and I wish you to let him see clearly that my wife is a different person from Richard Sedley's daughter."

"I hope that I know what is fitting for your wife," said Viola, who was all the more ready in her present humour to allow her individuality as a woman to be swallowed up in her wifehood and daughterhood.

When she went upstairs to dress for church, the thought that Harry might be there filled her with unrest.

Would he see her? Would he speak to her? and if so, in what manner? Would it be distant? or with the old ring in his voice which meant so much?

When Philip and his wife entered, the school-children and labourers were in their places, and a few of the farmers, as well as Mrs. Evans, and the party from the Rectory.

The brilliant morning light fell in slanting beams across the building, and through the Norman windows inattentive worshippers might watch the trees waving in the wind, or white clouds sailing across the sky.

The pew belonging to Upton Court was in the chancel: thither with echoing footsteps marched Sir Philip, following in the humble wake of Lady Dendraith in purple silk and bonnet tilted to one side in a rollicking fashion, of which the innocent wearer was quite unconscious.

To Viola's surprise, Geoffrey—now returned from his year at Sandhurst—appeared, and made for his sister's pew.

"Have you walked?" she whispered.

"Across country!—dead beat—couldn't stand Sunday at home—the Mother's laying it on hotter than ever—the Governor simply intolerable! Look at my boots!" They betrayed recent contact with mother-earth. "Came through all that to get away—wouldn't have let me go if I hadn't said I was coming to church."

"I'm glad you have come," said Viola.

Geoffrey kept up a running commentary on the people as they came in: "Caleb Foster! What does *he* come to church for?"

"For the same reason as every one else here present," said Philip: "to propitiate Mrs. Grundy."

"*I* come to propitiate my mother," said Geoffrey in a stage whisper.

"Mrs. Grundy masquerading," said Philip; "a man never

pays her so much attention as when she speaks through his mother, or his sister, or his cousin, or his aunt!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Pellett! Hurrah!" exclaimed the excitable youth, hoarse from speaking *sotto voce*.

Mrs. Pellett wore a bonnet which alone might have been a passport into heaven, if proved indifference to the pomps and vanities will take one there. But clearly Mrs. Pellett had no notion of trusting to her head-gear alone for a chance of admission; her expression, as she walked up the aisle, was unsurpassable, to say nothing of her books of devotion, whose size was prodigious. Her white-headed husband slowly followed. Among his books the old scholar was happy and at home, but out in the light of day, among a host of staring fellow-creatures, he felt bewildered. The smallest boy in the school might have bullied Mr. Pellett outside the walls of his study. His wife's signs to get out the books confused him, and made him shift his hat from one place to another, knock down the umbrellas, and finally propel the entire body of volumes full tilt against his wife when she was kneeling for preliminary prayer. There were few hearts in that church which did not leap with joy at the sight!

Dorothy Evans was visibly enraptured.

The Clevedon party arrived next, with several visitors—among them Arabella—and finally Mrs. Dixie appeared, followed by Adrienne—Viola held her breath—but, *not* Harry!

Why did he stay away? Had he gone to Mrs. Lincoln's? Was she keeping him from church?

The whole place seemed to have grown suddenly dark and bleak; how cold the pillars looked, how hard and rough the stone-work; how repellently uninteresting the faces of the people, how horribly ugly Mrs. Pellett's Sunday bonnet!

Mrs. Dixie and Adrienne caught Viola's eye, and Adrienne smiled across at her.

The congregation rose, and the service began.

Viola heard the familiar words rolling out, and heaved a sigh of something between relief and desperation. She looked round at the bent heads of the labourers, dull, patient creatures, bowing under the yoke of toil all through the week, and trooping on Sundays to praise the God who so ordered their soul-destroying lives. Yet it was with a sense of envy that Viola studied the vacant, bucolic faces.

She tried to follow the service as usual, but her thoughts were too quick, her heart too disturbed. She found herself absently turning over the leaves of the great Bible. The first words that attracted her attention were:

"So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold, the tears of such as are oppressed, and they had no comforter, and on the side of the oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter."

Always the tiny white clouds flitted merrily across the

little stage formed by the arch of the window opposite, and through it danced the light of the spring morning.

"I will sing of mercy and judgment; unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing!"

The people, in a slow, toiling manner, beat out the words of the Psalm. Viola felt heart-sickened and bewildered. Things spoke with many voices; there was a confusion of tongues; life was hedged round with mysteries, black as midnight; yet out of every gulf came some lightning-flash, quivering for a moment through the rolling vapours of darkness.

"The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed," sang the industrious people. Geoffrey, who was not musical, wandered about tentatively among the lower notes; but came out enjoyingly with the verses:

"I am like a pelican in the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert:

"I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-tops."

The picture of the forlorn sparrow seemed to attract him irresistibly.

What a medley it all was of the comic, the pathetic, the dull, the commonplace, and the tragic—a world in miniature!

By this time Lady Dendraith's bonnet had slipped so hopelessly out of position that Sir Philip rashly interfered, causing her to lose her bearings altogether, and reach a state of confusion in which he was powerless to help. There seemed to be no method in the madness of that bonnet, no apparent claim in any part of it to be more to the front or to the back than in any other part—a fatal difficulty in a headgear with whose geography one is not familiar.

Lady Dendraith spoke piteously of an *aigrette* as a landmark, but Sir Philip refused to investigate, with the usual impatience of husbands. The bonnet kept the schoolboys and Geoffrey happy for the rest of the service, and gave the old lady a severe qualm of dismay when she went home and consulted the glass. She looked like an elderly Bacchante just home from a revel! Meanwhile, she settled herself in a dark corner, and went decently to sleep.

The text of the sermon was from the Book of Job (Lady Dendraith gave a peaceful sigh when it was given out). The weary, passionate words thrilled through the shadows of the church, and every heart that knew suffering stirred responsively. Job, cursing the day of his birth, longs to be "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

"Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul, which long for death, but it cometh not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures, which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?"

Mr. Evans undertook to show that Job's sentiments were reprehensible; that in no circumstances is the human creature of God justified in desiring to evade the trials that He has appointed. "We must bow to the will of Heaven without

repining; we must accept, we must even welcome the trials that come to us, though we may be stricken by disease, and lonely and deserted as Job was. Resignation is the lesson of life and religion."

"It may be, my brethren, that we fancy ourselves better able to understand what is good for us than our Heavenly Father who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

Several shepherds in the congregation here felt the fatal opposition between religion and science; boisterous weather having set in immediately after the shearing on more occasions than one that they could mention. "We know that more will not be given to us than we can bear," Mr. Evans pursued, and his robust and prosperous appearance seemed to justify the opinion, though a glance at his worn, grey-looking wife might have bid him pause before making so sure of his doctrine.

Mr. Evans preached for about twenty minutes, and in that time he had succeeded in reducing to commonplace the utterances that have come ringing down to us through so many ages, fresh and hot from the soul of One who cried in anguish of body and anguish of soul.

As soon as the sermon was over, the organ began to fill the church with triumphant strains; the old clerk set open the doors, disclosing a view of the sunlit church-yard.

As the worm-eaten side-door was flung back Viola caught sight of two figures among the graves—those of Harry Lancaster and Mrs. Lincoln.

Mrs. Lincoln had on a blue cloak and hat of the same colour, on which was twined a wreath of real ivy. She was sitting on the side of a flat tomb, and Harry stood beside her, looking down. They were engaged in earnest conversation. Viola thought she had never seen so attractive a face. How could a bad woman look like that? There was something in her expression that filled Viola with an astonished belief that this woman might be implicitly trusted.

As the notes of the organ poured through the open doors, Sibella rose, and she and Harry strolled away together, as if to avoid encountering the people when they came out.

The church-door was the scene of many greetings.

Every one except Lady Clevedon said, "*What a lovely morning!*" unless he remarked, "What a gale there was last night!"

Dorothy and Mrs. Pellett waylaid Viola.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Dendraith; I hope you are feeling better than you look?"

"Oh, much!" Geoffrey answered for her. "Your dear mother is feeling very anxious about you, my dear."

"Thanks to your kind interest in my sister," said the irrepressible one. "My mother has scarcely had a wink of sleep for three weeks."

The rector came forward and shook hands all round.

"Mr. Evans, I *must* congratulate you on your sermon," cried Mrs. Pellett. "It was excellent—so *sound*."

Mr. Evans smiled and bowed deprecatingly. "Well, well, I trust that—that it *was* sound; I have always endeavoured to—to—in short, be sound. There is so much that is to be regretted in these days as regards—in fact, soundness. Charming morning, Mrs. Dixie, and what a gale we had last night! By the way, I hear I have to congratulate you on the unexpected return of your son."

"Yes, we are indeed glad to have the dear fellow back again."

Viola was greeted effusively by Arabella. How long it was since they had met! She really must try and get over to see Mrs. Dendraith; but so much always went on at Clevedon. There was to be a large gathering there on the 12th—everybody invited. And so that dear Mr. Lancaster, whom Augusta was so fond of, had come back! Had Mrs. Dendraith heard of it?

Mrs. Courtenay's sharp little brown eyes, fixed upon Viola's face, were like two gimblets.

Yes, Mrs. Dendraith had heard of it from her husband.

"You have not seen him yet, I suppose?"

The moment was a crucial one for Viola, to whom an untruth seemed almost impossible. Perhaps Arabella saw that she was perturbed, and scenting a mystery, perhaps an improper mystery (Oh, joy of the proper!), she pinned her dear Mrs. Dendraith unwarrantably to the point.

"You have seen Mr. Lancaster, perhaps? I hope he is looking well?"

"I hear that he is," said Viola.

"Oh, then you have *not* seen him?"

This was cruel. "Yes, I have seen him," said Viola at last, in desperation, not perceiving any loophole of escape. But nothing could induce her to continue the conversation. She plunged after husband and brother in the hope of persuading them to leave. But when she appealed to Geoffrey, Arabella bore down upon Philip.

"Charmed to meet your wife again, Mr. Dendraith," said Arabella, with one of her most irresistible wriggles. "I am always accusing Fate for her unkindness in putting fourteen miles between our houses."

"Nobody can regret that more than I do," returned Philip.

"O Mr. Dendraith! you are as bad as ever!"

"I fear that in your society I shall become considerably worse," he replied.

"Dear, dear, what will your wife say if I let you go on like this? Is she a jealous person? I really hope not, for she would have much to suffer. You don't know what it is to be jealous, I am sure. How nice that must be!"

"It is," said Philip.

"You are a spoilt child of Nature, Mr. Dendraith—all the

gilt without the gingerbread—no, I don't mean that quite—all the plums without the cake! No, that won't do either—but you know how excellent are my intentions! Now, haven't you some Upton news to tell me—somebody has surely died, or got married since I left? I hear that charming creature, Mr. Lancaster, has returned—quite the pet of the village, isn't he?"

"Oh quite!" said Philip.

"Your wife tells me he is looking so well——"

Philip gave a slight movement of the eyebrows. "Nobody heard of his arrival till last night," he observed.

"Really! And yet I thought she told me that she had met him—a mistake, no doubt, on my part."

"If you never made a mistake of graver importance, Mrs. Courtenay, you have my sincere congratulations."

"Now, Arabella," interposed Lady Clevedon, "you have chattered long enough; Philip, I want you and Viola to dine with us on the 12th; will you?"

"Charmed," said Philip; "let me see—the 12th. No, I have nothing on the 12th."

"We have some people coming—a good many of the neighbours; and there are one or two staying in the house who can sing and play, so we shall have some music. If you can perform, bring your instrument."

"The big drum," said Philip,—"it shall accompany me."

Geoffrey returned with his sister and her husband for luncheon. On the way, they fell to discussing Harry Lancaster's sudden return.

"It must be just over two years since you saw him, Viola," said her husband. She did not answer.

"Or is it longer? The last time was at our marriage—"

"Oh! if you're going in for dates," cried Geoffrey, "I shall put cotton wool in my ears. I know no subject more deadly uninteresting. Let us not recall the past."

"It has been said that no man would willingly react his part in it," Philip observed.

"Certainly no *woman* would!" Viola said under her breath.

"Arabella seems in good form, tricky as ever! Adorable Arabella!"

"Grinning idiot!" exclaimed the irreverent Geoffrey.

"She has a graceful habit of putting her foot in it, which I cannot enough admire," pursued Philip, with one of his short, sudden, voiceless laughs. "She cheerfully informed me to-day that Viola had already seen Harry Lancaster, and thought him looking well. As Viola had heard of his arrival only this morning from my own lips, I was obliged to reprove Arabella for inaccuracy."

"What on earth put it into her head that Viola had seen him?" cried Geoffrey.

"Arabella's is not a head that I should like to have to account for," returned Philip, watching his wife's face furtively.

She was very pale.

"What had you been telling her, Viola?" cried her brother. "You know it won't do to let a woman like Mrs. Courtenay go about saying that you have seen Harry Lancaster before anyone else had heard of his arrival. It doesn't sound well."

Philip's cat-like instinct found full indulgence this afternoon through Arabella's communication. Nearly, but not quite, Viola found herself a hundred times confronted with the alternative necessities of telling a falsehood and confessing where and how she had seen Harry. To admit it thus late in the day, implying the previous concealment was distasteful. On the other hand, Viola thought it probable that Philip had *not* really believed Mrs. Courtenay to be inaccurate, and that he now amused himself by this slow torture of his wife, whose secret was no longer hers to keep.

"Upon my word, Viola," said Geoffrey, with an air of worldly wisdom worthy of his promised moustache, "I must take an opportunity skilfully to put Mrs. Courtenay right about that matter. Lancaster used rather to dangle after you before your marriage, and there's nothing too ridiculous for people to say."

They had just arrived at the house, and were standing at the front door, when Viola was seized with a frantic impulse to turn from that great iron-bound portal, and run away, no matter whither, so only that she need never again cross the threshold. A strong excitement held her—it seemed that her one chance of averting some hideous catastrophe lay in the desperate act of immediate flight; it was hers to decide upon it now, or to follow the fatal path to the end.

A wild idea that she might go to Harry even flashed across her.

The hot sun pouring down upon the gravel and on the grey stone steps darted madness into her brain (or was it supreme wisdom?).

Why, she asked herself wildly, did God forbid His forsaken children, whom he had permitted to be degraded, to wash out stains and memories unendurable, in the waters of Death? Why did he force them to return to be tortured anew with indignity heaped on indignity?

The sunshine was blinding. Viola put out her hand to steady herself against the stone balustrade, for she was faint and slightly swaying. She gave a terrified start!

"Ah! pitiful God!" she *dared* not cross that threshold, for there was blood upon it! Yes, *blood*! a stream which seemed to be coming from the house, oozing slowly under the door, stealthily moving forward to the steps till it dripped, dripped——

"By Jove, Philip! look out—quick! lend us a hand; Viola has fainted!"

And so across the threshold, over the phantom blood-stream which she alone had seen upon the doorstep, the unconscious burden was carried into the house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DANGEROUS ACQUAINTANCE.

WHEN Viola regained consciousness she was lying in bed. Mrs. Barber, with a portentous array of eau-de-cologne and sal-volatile bottles, stood over her, looking unutterable woe. She fell to rubbing Viola's hands, and to applying vast quantities of eau-de-cologne to her forehead.

"Well, I *am* glad to see you restored, ma'am! I thought you was dead and gone, that I did! Permit me to apply some more eau-de-cologne just above the temples."

"Thank you, Mrs. Barber; not any more at present," said Viola, who was already sopping just above the temples, in consequence of the housekeeper's amiable enthusiasm. "If I might have a dry handkerchief—the eau-de-cologne is running into my eyes."

"I expect the walk was too long for you," Mrs. Barber continued; "on a hot day like this, too! I never did think these long walks was quite conducive."

Viola longed to lie back and rest and be silent, but Mrs. Barber talked on till at last Philip and Geoffrey came up, and the housekeeper retired. "All right now, Viola?"

"Yes, I am better," she said.

"Harry Lancaster has been calling," said Geoffrey, "but we thought it better not to let you come down to see him. He was sorry to hear of your not being quite well to-day."

"Oh!" She seemed but little interested.

"And he was sorry to miss seeing you—and other things polite. I don't think he looks well."

"Are you going to get up again to-day?"

"Yes, I am all right now."

Viola dreaded that as soon as Geoffrey left, Philip would speak to her about her meeting with Harry. But he did not mention the subject. Perhaps he despised the power of deception in Harry and herself too much to care to inquire further. But his watchfulness was incessant.

The house seemed to stifle her; she hurried out and away across the gardens to the cliff-side pathway leading to the beach. The sea was just growing calm with the sinking of the wind, and gleaming with the mellow tints of the afternoon. There was a whisper of spring in the air; little white clouds overhead were carrying the sweet message from land to land.

In a few minutes Viola was on the lonely shore, the waters sweeping to her feet. She lay against a long wave-like ridge

of pebbles, which the tide had flung up to stem their own advance upon the land.

At times of strong excitement the stream of feeling is not simple, but infinitely complex.

Viola lay watching the overlapping curves of the little waves that raced one another to the strand, watching the fret-work of foam spreading between ridge and ridge, and the brilliant reds and browns which the touch of water revealed in the "so seeming virtuous" pebbles, like the unsuspected things that tears will summon forth in human hearts.

> "Wave after wave for ten thousand years
> Has furrowed the brown sand here;
> Wave after wave under clouds and stars
> Has cried in the dead shore's ear."

Thus, for centuries before, the sea had beaten just as to-day on the crumbling coast, and probably for centuries after would beat so, while the joy and the anguish of human souls came and passed away, as the shadow of a cloud over the sea, or as a tremor in some salt pool left by the resilient waves.

When the human being fully realises how utterly it is swallowed and lost in the world's Infinities, the moment is always vital and terrible, though it has been felt and described so many times before. True realisation seldom comes until, seeking in vain for help, the sufferer finds himself shouting to a deaf Universe, and hears his own voice dismally echoing through the unending spaces.

Viola, who had hitherto been shielded by religious teaching from this conception, felt the horror of it come upon her as she lay on the shore to-day, overpoweringly. There was pain, look which way she would: pain in her own little world of being—exquisite, unbearable; pain in the thought of the vast soulless, indifferent Universe, a giant machine grinding on without haste and without rest. Where were the precious morning's faith and peace? All gone; and in their place, doubts, hatred, disgust, wounded dignity, wounded affection, devouring anxiety; and over all a consciousness that this hot emotion mattered nothing and availed nothing; that presently the waves would be beating and retreating with only the cliff and the gulls for audience. Religion spoke warningly, but the familiar voice was not heeded. Viola, turning her face to the hard stones, broke into deep, silent, terrible sobbing. Some heart-string seemed to break with each sob.

So still had she lain there, that the sea-gulls, cold-hearted birds, came sweeping close to her, and over her head.

At length the crisis of passion arrived; the wave broke, and passed on. There was one tight, stifled cry, and then Viola, changing her attitude, fell into a sort of lethargy. She was dimly conscious of the stirring wind and the unresting sea-sound; dimly conscious of the golden glow that began to light

up the sky. The waves sounded hoarse and desperate. Deeper and deeper grew the blood-red stain upon the waters; and the land seemed to have caught fire. The swiftest cloud-streaks were overtaken, and their cool white turned to gold. At the wet wave-line upon the sands a figure clad in red was slowly strolling, stooping now and again with swift movement to snatch some feathery sea-weed from the tide.

A large brown dog accompanied her, barking as she flung pebbles into the sea.

Viola, lying exhausted against the ridge of pebbles, opened her eyes and beheld the animal standing beside her, dripping from tail, legs, and ears.

But a voice recalled him. Viola started up. She felt that she ought to rise and flee from it; it was the voice of a siren luring from the ways of righteousness.

Sibella, turning to pick up a stone for her tyrannical dog, found herself face to face with Viola.

Both women coloured deeply, and for a moment there was a silence. "I beg your pardon for unknowingly disturbing you; I thought myself alone." Sibella hesitated, coloured again, and then said, almost shyly: "I have been very anxious for this meeting, Mrs. Dendraith (you observe this is not the first time I have seen you)." Viola, too excited and bewildered to know what she thought or felt, sat gazing at her companion in silence.

Perhaps Sibella saw or divined her frame of mind, for she sat quietly down on the shingle by her side, and began to talk.

She spoke simply, but with a subtle implication of comradeship which touched Viola's loneliness, as the glow of the fireside is welcome to one shivering and belated. Then, more fancifully, she spoke of the sea, of its perpetual variety, its endless range of expression and meaning.

She went on to speak about the down country inland, contrasting it with the tame fields and pastures among which she had spent her childhood and her married life. Viola grew interested, and the more Sibella told her the more breathlessly interested she became. There was a strange resemblance to her own experience in the story that Sibella told. She, too, had been strictly brought up; she, too, had begun life with a store of "principles."

Before half an hour had passed, Viola was speaking as she had never spoken to human being before; her cheeks were flushed; her eyes burnt with excitement. The unwonted utterance had thrown a confused light upon her own emotions; while the comments of her companion, flinging brilliant cross-flashes, frightened and allured at the same time. She could not turn her eyes away from the baleful glare, accounting it infernal as so short a time ago she would have done. She had gone through too much; reality and passion had touched

her, and left no choice but to turn and listen to one in whom reality and passion were free and unresisted agents.

"But what do you mean? I don't understand; it turns things topsy-turvy to think so!" Viola cried with a sort of terror-stricken excitement. She stretched out her arm as if trying to grasp again the bulwarks of her creed.

A firm, gentle hand was laid in hers: "Don't be frightened to open your eyes and to use your reason. If the creeds of our youth are true, they can bear the light. We have both been taught (as we imagined) to worship God; I fear that we have really been taught to worship the Devil! We were trained to submission, to accept things as they are, to serve God by resignation—yes, even the resignation of our human dignity; whereas the Devil laughs in his sleeve, and carries off the fruits of miserable lives to add to the riches of his kingdom."

"Oh! I can never believe so," cried Viola.

"No, we were both well-grounded," said Sibella, "but you are naturally more conscientious than I. The better the soil, the richer harvest for the Devil. I always questioned and doubted, though from force of circumstances I obeyed. But there came a crisis in my life, and then I broke loose. I don't say it is a success; a woman's life can never be a real success: but in refusing to submit to what was degrading, I have at least rescued myself from the unbearable self-loathing——" The speaker paused as Viola drew in her breath sharply. Sibella laid her hand upon her arm. "It is better to face things," she said quietly. "I told you in what circumstances my marriage took place; you have not suffered quite alone. A mere child, brought up without knowledge of life, of my fellow-creatures, of the very laws and customs which were to rule my destiny, I shared the fate of thousands of our sisters, who are kept in a like ignorance. Everything in my surrounding was untrue, unscientific, groundless, fabricated. In my cramped, painful little world there were a thousand invented crimes, a thousand invented tortures; and in the close motionless atmosphere these things grew more monstrous and unwholesome every day. This process of education and subsequent marriage through which so many girls are made to go always reminds me of the torture that the Romans inflicted upon one of their generals who had offended them: they cut off his eyelids, and then compelled him to sit in the blazing sun! I was asked to give my hand in marriage to a man whom I scarcely knew and for whom I cared nothing—a man who regarded women as his lawful prey. In a wife he simply looked for a creature who would become his possession, and the mother of his children. The family was eager for an heir. To provide one, and afterwards to devote to him my whole life and energies, was to be my sacred duty and privilege."

Viola gave a slight movement, and Sibella tightened the grasp of her hand.

"I, of course, did not understand all this; but could I? My pastors and masters had twined garlands of poetry round the brow of the skull that they called "woman's destiny,' they had exhausted the dictionary for terms to express its blessedness."

"You must think wrongly of it!" Viola broke out. "It is God-ordained. Don't take that belief from me, or I shall go mad."

"You have lost that belief already; *I* am not taking it from you."

Viola turned away, not denying. After a moment of silence she said. "Please go on; this has a terrible interest for me."

"Well, I consented," said Sibella. "My parents must have known that the marriage was unsuitable; but they had brought up their daughter to be 'high-principled,' and they trusted to that to keep things 'straight,' and the 'family honour' (as they humorously called it) intact. As a rule the method answers: society is founded upon the success of such arrangements, but in my case it failed.

"I ought not to listen," Viola murmured.

"You ought to listen and then to judge," said Sibella. "The story is so pitifully obvious, and yet nobody sees it, or at any rate says it; and so the hoary old hypocrisies are kept up, the threadbare cant of which yet holds bravely together, and is thick enough to hide the truth from our crops of fresh young victims as they spring up year after year."

Viola pushed back the hair from her brow in a sort of desperation.

"The average woman," Sibella pursued, "spends her energies in making all these time-honoured social iniquities possible and successful, encouraging the repetition of these profitable old crimes. The fortitude and goodness of the victims are counted upon to ward off the natural punishment. It is for the victims to pay the price. They must do this, and keep silence, on pain of excommunication. If the fortitude breaks down, then what a hue-and-cry! The wretched woman is hunted, scorned, ruined; there is no mercy." Sibella turned to her companion: "Are you going to make successful another of these villanies? Are all women who come after you to be heavier hearted because of you?"

Viola half rose, as if to leave her dangerous companion; but she did not go. As she was hesitating, there came a sound of footsteps on the shingle.

She raised herself to look over the pebble-ridge.

"Is any one coming?" asked Sibella.

"My husband," she said.

"Oh!" Sibella's expression had changed. "He will be angry at finding us together—I quite understand it was my fault, if fault there be. Remain passive. Say as little as you can, and keep as much as possible your usual manner."

He lifted his eyebrows slightly on seeing who his wife's companion was.

"Mrs. Lincoln! what fortunate star directed my steps towards this spot?"

"Then you are glad to find me here!" Sibella observed, looking up into his face with a singular smile.

"Do you cast a doubt upon my good taste?" he inquired.

"I cannot be guilty of that mistake, since meeting your wife."

"I bow for us both," returned Philip; "I never can get my wife to bow for herself."

"She has an admirable model always before her eyes. I am lost in admiration of your bows. I wish you had lived in the last century."

"Thanks," said Philip; "you would have been perfect in a minuette. Stateliness and *grace* has died out nowadays. Pardon me——"

"Oh! this is *too* much!" laughed Sibella. "My worst enemies have never yet called me *stately!* Graceful?"—she pursed up her lips and raised her eyebrows—"perhaps; I HAVE studied that a little—but stately! I should die in the attempt!"

"You do not leave a bewildered creature time to catalogue your attributes, Mrs. Lincoln," said Philip; "he can only think of you as a delightful and dazzling whole."

"I am glad you don't think me unfinished," said Sibella. "I am so delighted to have made Mrs. Dendraith's acquaintance; one never really knows a man till one knows his wife. Mrs. Dendraith throws unconsciously a flood of light on your character. Most becoming," she added.

Philip's lips looked rather tight about the corners, but he smiled, and said suavely: "It is very kind of you to take my wife in hand, Mrs. Lincoln. To know you is a liberal education."

"As usual, you overwhelm me."

"If you stay much longer in this position I fear the sea will do that," Philip returned. "Viola, my love, do you contemplate restoring the grace of your presence to my humble abode before nightfall?"

"I am ready to come now."

"Then my house will be a home once more!" he said, drawing Viola away to the side farthest from Sibella.

"Mrs. Lincoln, you will permit me to walk back with you?"

"Thank you, no; I do not require an escort."

"Once more then, let me express my deep gratitude to you for having interested yourself so kindly in my wife." He looked Sibella full in the face as he said this, holding out his hand. Laying hers in it, she returned the look point-blank, and replied with a little smile and bend of the head,

"Please don't thank me; I feel myself so unworthy. Though

I am interested in all that concerns you, my interest in Mrs. Dendraith has arisen quite independently of any such sentiment, and your thanks weigh heavily on my soul, as ill-gotten treasure. Once more, Good-bye!"

She turned with a last significant bow and smile, called her dog, and walked quickly away.

"Was this prearranged?" Philip asked.

"No; accidental."

"Perhaps you had other fish to fry?" he suggested.

She did not answer.

"I need not observe that our fascinating friend is not fit society for you, my dear."

Although this had been Viola's own opinion until this afternoon, she flushed painfully.

"You must intimate politely but firmly that you feel obliged to forego the pleasure of her further acquaintance. Better avoid the shore in the afternoons, as she seems inclined to make it a promenade.

"What is she accused of?" asked Viola.

"A mere friskiness," returned Philip, "culminating in a trifling elopement, scarcely worth mentioning—Lancaster's bosom friend Elliott was the happy man."

"Did she go away with him?"

"Well, no, she went away alone, but it is supposed that he followed her afterwards. Anyhow she did not break with him as a woman would have done in her slippery position. There was no divorce, of course; but her character is gone. No woman can associate with her and keep her own in good feather. I wonder a young person of respectable instincts like you would be seen speaking to her. It must not happen again!"

"What has become of the man Elliott?"

"Elliott? That is a delicate question, my dear. What *does* happen to men who run after other men's wives? Scripture is mute upon the subject. Elliott is now expiating his misdeeds in another, but, alas! I dare not affirm with confidence a better, world. Perchance he is doomed to a cycle of never-ending flirtation under climatic conditions extremely oppressive."

"Is he dead?" asked Viola.

"You are a trifle bald, my love, in your expression; say rather, 'he has departed,' 'he has gone to another sphere,' 'he is at rest.' Of course the last is rather euphonious than instructive."

"Has any one a right to condemn Mrs. Lincoln when her sin is only a matter of conjecture?" asked Viola.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly not. I merely explain to you that to associate with her is to take the bloom off your own reputation, and I have no notion of a wife in that bloomless condition. Now I hope I have explained myself clearly, my dear.

Not a breath, not a whisper, shall go forth against the woman to whom I have given my name. Take care that you do nothing to give rise to it. You will see nobody, man or woman, without my knowledge; you will make no new acquaintance, man or woman, without my knowledge; you will receive no letter that is unseen by me; and now"—Philip held open the gate into the garden gallantly,—"now to the home of which you are the Sunbeam."

CHAPTER XXX.

A TOUGH BATTLE.

SIBELLA sat in a low chair before the fire, with a blotting-pad and writing-materials on her knee.

She had abandoned her ruddy-tinted gown, and wore a fashionably made dress of dark cloth neatly braided. Mrs. Russel Courtenay herself would not have felt unhappy in the attire.

Several sheets of writing-paper lay on the table, each with the commencement of a letter abruptly abandoned. Sibella was now struggling with another letter, writing a few words between long intervals of gazing into the fire. She wrote to the end of the first page, then with an impatient movement tore off the half sheet, crumpled it in her hand and threw it into the flames.

The next few minutes were spent in pensively sketching fabulous creatures on the edge of the blotting-pad, and writing under them the names of common domestic animals. Sibella appeared to devote herself heart and soul to this occupation, looking at her sketch from this side and from that, adding brightness to the eye, and spirit to the tail, by means of deeply considered touches.

The being under which she traced the letters D O G had a strange, square-looking jaw and an appalling grin; his tail when unfurled must have been available as a weapon at a distance of several yards, and along his backbone the hair stood up in a ridge, indicating a spirit sorely aggrieved. Facing this work of art was a creature of the panther order, thin and strong and agile, with a watchful eye, and a look of stealthy swiftness.

Under this image the artist wrote, somewhat inconsequently, "Philip Dendraith."

"DEAR MRS. DENDRAITH: It will surprise and I fear displease you to receive——"

"DEAR MRS. DENDRAITH: Please believe that I am actuated by a friendly spirit——"

"DEAR MRS. DENDRAITH: Could you meet me to-morrow afternoon on the shore at three o'clock? I want very much to——"

Sibella pushed away the paper in despair.

She placed her elbows on her knees, and supporting her chin on her hands, sat looking steadily into the fire.

The front-door bell rang.

"Ah! if it were only that poor girl!"

Sibella gathered together her papers and awaited the entrance of the visitor. A maid brought a card.

"The lady wishes to know if you could see her."

The shadow of a train of thought seemed to pass through Sibella's eyes in the second of silence that followed.

"I shall be glad to see Miss Lancaster."

Adrienne, looking rather pale but very composed, was ushered into the room.

Sibella had risen and bowed.

"I have to apologize for this intrusion," began Adrienne.

"Please don't apologize. Will you take a chair near the fire?"

"Thank you; I would prefer to avoid it; the wind is strong outside——"

Adrienne sat down, wondering if there was anything in her manner to show that her heart was beating so hard that she could scarcely draw her breath.

"I think it well to plunge into my business at once," she said when Sibella had drawn her chair facing her visitor and placed herself in a calm attitude of attention.

"Please do so."

"I come on behalf of my friend Mrs. Dendraith."

"She has sent you?"

"Not exactly. Yesterday afternoon I called at her house, and found that she had just returned from a long interview with you on the beach. Mrs. Dendraith told me all that you had said to her."

Adrienne looked her hostess full in the face, as if she expected her to flinch from her righteous gaze.

"She told you all that I had said to her," Sibella repeated, with the gleam of a smile in her eyes; "and what did you think of it?"

Adrienne flushed with indignation.

"Since you ask me, Mrs. Lincoln, I must confess that I think it is the most extraordinary, the most unprincipled advice that I ever heard in my life! I listened to Mrs. Dendraith in incredulous amazement. I know that you have long been my brother's friend, and therefore I have hitherto felt ready to believe well of you——"

Sibella gave a little bow.

"But when I hear that you not only hold such views your-

self, but actually try to poison with them the innocent mind of a young wife, then I feel——"

"That the innocent mind calls for your protection. I admire your championship and self-sacrifice. This interview must be painful to you."

"I should have imagined that *you* might have felt it painful," said Adrienne with a gasp.

"Oh no," returned Sibella, politely, "not at all."

The visitor was silent for a moment, collecting her energies. "I came here to day to make an appeal to you, to rouse your sense of justice and mercy, to represent to you what a terrible injury you may do to that young wife. She is not happy, as a person of your penetration would quickly see. But she is supported by high principle; she is noble, she is self-sacrificing, she is pure; faith is her sheet-anchor; I consider that any one who robs her of it, or shakes it by so much as a passing doubt, is guilty of a cruel, of an accursed deed."

Adrienne paused, breathless with disgust and anger.

Mrs. Lincoln's steady look was full of judicial attention, yet her expression was almost sympathetic.

"I have believed," Adrienne went on, curbing her indignation—"I have always believed that no human being is wholly devoid of good."

"Not even such as I, Miss Lancaster?"

"Not if you will give the better impulses fair play," Adrienne returned severely, at which the other smiled.

"O Mrs. Lincoln, if you had seen that poor girl yesterday as I saw her, you would not smile! It was terrible. She came to me entreating and imploring that I would make her believe again! that I would reconvince her of her own principles and of the love of God. Everything seemed to have gone from her—and it is *you*, Mrs. Lincoln, whom she has to thank for this! I wish you had seen her fling herself upon the sofa crying that she could not endure to live; that she was lowered and humiliated forever; that it was intolerable to *be herself!* Of course it is a very morbid idea, but I cannot get it out of her head."

"Ah!" Sibella said quietly, "to feel so is to endure the tortures of the damned."

"Are you quite heartless?" Adrienne exclaimed, bringing down her little clenched hand upon her knee; "have you no pity and no forbearance? If you *must* have disciples, if you *can't* rest satisfied with flinging over every law of God and that on your own account, why, in the name of reason, must you pick out sensitive creatures to suffer in this dreadful way?"

"You care for this girl very sincerely, I think," said Sibella.

"I would do almost anything for her."

"It will surprise you when I say that *I* too would do almost anything for her."

"No, it does not surprise me; nothing that you might say or do could surprise me any further. A woman who dares

advise repudiation of her most sacred duty, to one so pure and sweet as Viola Dendraith, would hesitate at nothing."

There was a pause.

"You do not even defend yourself," Adrienne exclaimed.

"Because, Miss Lancaster (to follow your excellent example of limpid sincerity), I do not see my way to making you understand."

Adrienne bowed. "It is then owing to my inferior intelligence that I differ from you," she said. "I never before felt occasion to bless my stupidity."

"Then your experience has not at all resembled mine," Sibella answered. "I have blessed *my* stupidity again and again. When I am dead there will be found written on my heart, '*Blessed are the stupid, for they shall never be confounded!*'"

Her eyes were sparkling wickedly in spite of her cool manner; her words, quiet, pointed, swift to the point as hailstones, stung as they fell.

"Alas! you are *not* stupid, Miss Lancaster, if you will excuse my saying so."

"A compliment from *you*——" murmured Adrienne.

Sibella gave a shrug. "A compliment from me is nevertheless worth having," she said.

"I can bear your good opinion of my intellect, but for heaven's sake don't tell me you approve of my *principles!*"

"I am not going to," Sibella answered, "for I don't."

They sat looking at one another, for a second, in silence.

"Am I to understand that you intend to pursue Mrs. Dendraith's acquaintance?" Adrienne at length asked.

"A question I scarcely feel called upon to answer," said Sibella; "but this I will say, that whatever seems to me to be best for your friend, that I shall do."

"Perhaps you are not very well acquainted with her husband?" Adrienne suggested.

"I have had some opportunity of studying his character."

"If so, you know what it means to oppose him."

Sibella bent her head.

"And that he has absolutely forbidden his wife to meet you or any one without his knowledge."

"Having appealed in vain to my better feelings, you now appeal to my fears," said Sibella. "Yes, I know all that."

"And you intend to measure your strength with his?"

"He having on his side nine tenths of the law, to say nothing of his wife's own conscience, and the powerful alliance of high-principled friends, it is madness, is it not?"

Adrienne looked at the speaker from head to foot.

She was slight, graceful, soft in outline and in attitude. Her pose was rather indolent, though there lay in it a subtle hint of large reserve force. The face at this moment wore a peculiarly soft expression.

In spite of her strong feelings of disapproval, Adrienne felt

interested; she was vaguely conscious of something incomprehensible in this unprincipled woman. Sibella must be inherently bad; if a character failed to catalogue itself under one's own familiar headings, there was nothing but badness to account for it,—unless indeed it were *madness*.

"Miss Lancaster," said Sibella suddenly, turning her eyes from the sea, "it is childish for you and for me to sit here bandying words. That will not avail either of us, and we forget our sisterhood in foolish opposition."

Adrienne did not appear to care to acknowleged the sisterhood.

"But we *are* sisters," Sibella pursued, answering the unspoken thought; "we are separated only because we can't see clearly into one another's mind; that is all. It is only dimness of sight that holds us back. You think of opinions, things social and things of rule, of names and shadows, and you turn coldly away and deny the common nature which makes us sisters against our will. We are one; we are human." Sibella again turned her eyes seawards. "We stand shivering between two eternities; we came out of the darkness, and we see the darkness waiting for us a little way ahead—such a little way! and we have to pick our steps, among rough stones, and our feet bleed; and we try to roll some of the stones away, and they are too heavy for us, and we are lonely, and the Place of Stones where tread is very bleak, and we cry out that we must have love and hope or we die. And Love comes, and our hearts leap up, and every stone at our feet breaks into colour, and every wave and every dew-drop gleams. And then a cloud comes into the sky, and Love goes away shivering, and with him go Joy and Sympathy, and Brotherhood hand in hand. But we yearn after him still, and we seek for him all our days. That is your story and mine, there is no real difference between them. Opinions, things of rule, haunt us like phantoms, and we bend the knee to them and let the incense that they swing before our faces mount to the brain and deaden it. And when, in our wanderings, we come across a fellow-struggler, the phantoms crowd around us and hold him off, saying: 'This creature is accursed; do not commune with him; us he refuses to acknowledge; touch him not, accost him not; he is no brother of yours,' and we pass on, thinking 'he is no brother of mine' while our hearts cry out for the brotherhood that we turn from. We want it, we droop and pine for it; but the Phantoms assure us that all is well, and we try to crush down our longings and march on obediently, phantom-led into the darkness."

Sibella paused for a moment and then went on in a tone still sadder: "And each one has his life-struggle to go through, and death to face; each, with his attendant phantoms, must pass from mystery to mystery. Believe me, only the phantoms hold apart soul from soul."

There was a long silence. At last, Adrienne said with changed expression, "I suppose you will say that *I* am under the government of my phantoms."

"As more or less we all are."

"Dou *you* acknowledge to that?"

"I? I am under the influence of all things!" Sibella replied; "no one more so."

Adrienne looked thoughtful, and after a moment she drew herself together.

"I think, Mrs. Lincoln, that the differences between us have little to do with what you call phantoms. They are very real indeed. Our ideas seem to me to represent black and white, positive and negative, good and evil."

Sibella made no reply. She took up, in evident absence of mind, the pen that lay beside her on the table, and began to trace outlines on a scrap of paper. A procession of grim but shadowy forms followed close upon the heels of a more substantial figure, and from every side troops of shadows crowded up out of the dimness, in attitudes of command, or exhortation, or entreaty, or sadness. Far away was a range of high, peaked mountains; but the shadows were very near and loomed large, so that only now and then, for a brief moment, could the human being, so close beset, catch a glimpse of the eternal hills; and when he did so, the vision was so strange, and new, and startling that he felt afraid or thought that he had gone mad. Then the shadows bent down comforting, and closed up their ranks till the vision was forgotten.

Sibella looked up at last.

"Tell me," she said, "the doctrine that you hold, wherewith alone we can be saved."

"I am sorry that I can't put my ideas of what is pure and right into a nutshell," said Adrienne; "all I can say is that they are very unlike yours."

"Am I to understand, Mrs. Lincoln, that you intend to seriously attempt to lead Mrs. Dendraith to throw aside her duty and repudiate the ties that she has formed?"

"That have been formed *for* her, let us say for the sake of accuracy."

"Excuse me," said Adrienne, "but in this country no woman can be forced to marry against her will."

"Wide is the infernal kingdom, and perfect its government! You do not know the story of Mrs. Dendraith's girlhood and marriage."

"Whatever her story may be, I cannot see that any hardships, or any other person's faults, can justify her in evading the simple laws of right and wrong, merely because they happen to press her rather closely."

"Nor do I see," returned Sibella, "that the daily unpunished sins of society against its women should continue to be expiated by their victims instead of their perpetrators! This girl has suffered more in a couple of years than her amiable

father could suffer in a lifetime. Let *him* suffer now; it is his turn."

"Then you would advise her to leave her husband and disgrace her family."

Sibella drew a long breath. Adrienne watched her intently.

"And her good devoted mother!—is she not worth to be considered?"

"Her good devoted mother sacrificed the girl, open-eyed, in the name of all that is sacred. It is interesting to remember that Druid priests used to cram great wicker images with young girls and children, and then set fire to them—also in the name of all that is sacred."

"What has this to do with what we are speaking of?"

"History repeats itself," said Sibella; "no doubt any interference with those sacrificial rights would have greatly pained a sincere and 'conscientious' Druid, but I confess that I should quite cheerfully inflict upon him that pain if I could thereby save the imageful of victims, even if he regarded his honour and the honour of his whole family as for ever sullied."

"You scoff, then, at family honour."

"I confess," said Sibella, "that I am not very tender about the honour that nourishes itself on the fortitude and sufferings of others."

"I fear appeal to you will be in vain. You fling over, with a light heart, the creeds and the traditions of centuries, all that our forefathers have taught us, all that our mothers have prayed and suffered for. For my part, I am old-fashioned enough to believe that our ancestors may have been as wise as ourselves."

"That I never disputed," Sibella threw in.

"And I do not feel competent to decide for myself every question under the sun."

"A very creditable humility," said Sibella; "but if you regard it as presumptuous to reject the doctrines of your forefathers, you must possess a vast and varied store of opinions; for you are very much to be envied—especially if you succeed in keeping the peace among them."

Adrienne grew impatient.

"Of course I don't mean that I take every idea without exception——"

"You take only those that suit you; then after all, Miss Lancaster, I do not see that your humility so very much transcends mine."

Adrienne, who was accustomed to rule the conversational world of Upton, felt angry and bewildered.

She had a complete and dignified confidence in her "principles;" an underlying satisfaction in her powers of insight, of language, and of judgment. To-day all these seemed at fault.

Sibella was of course profoundly mistaken, but it was not

very easy to make the fact appear. Adrienne's cause, although that of Heaven, did not triumph as so righteous a cause ought to have triumphed.

The usual comfort of the baffled advocate of Heaven was denied her; for Adrienne did *not* regard herself as weak in argument or retort—quite the reverse. If, under her guardianship, Heaven lost ground, the look out for Heaven was very serious.

No one sooner than Adrienne would have laughed at the position had it been boldly presented, but so mysterious are the workings of the mind that all are capable of taking mental attitudes which the sense of humour would alone forbid were it brought to bear upon the case.

"I fear I have not won you over to my views," said Adrienne; "and therefore it seems useless for us to continue the interview, though I shall leave you with a heavy heart, as I feel that my poor friend has an insidious and powerful enemy just when she has most need of allies. I, at any rate, shall spare no effort to counteract your influence."

"A declaration of war," said Sibella, rising and going over to the fire.

"You leave me no alternative. I cannot stand by and see that girl disgrace herself and everyone connected with her. I consider not only the girl herself, but her people—especially her mother and father."

"Ah! she must save his elms and his honour," said Sibella. "She has not frizzled in her wicker cage long enough to satisfy her friends."

"I entirely dispute the analogy between Viola's case and Druidical sacrifices," said Adrienne.

"Therein also history repeats itself," returned Sibella.

Adrienne, who had half risen, paused undecidedly.

Something in Mrs. Lincoln's face made her go up to her, as she stood leaning against the mantelpiece, her head upon her hand in a dejected attitude.

"I ask you to have pity, Mrs. Lincoln," said Adrienne; "I ask you, a woman, to help me to save this sister from the worst fate which the world has to offer. Never mind whether or not the world is justified in so punishing her; all you need consider is that it *does* so punish her, and that the punishment means *absolute ruin*. Think of it!—a girl sheltered as Viola has been sheltered, accustomed to refined society——"

"Her father's, for instance," Mrs. Lincoln suggested.

"Accustomed to be protected from all slight or insult——"

"Her husband's, for example——"

"To be cared for and saved from all offensiveness and vulgarity——"

"Mrs. Pellett's and Mrs. Russel Courtenay's."

Adrienne paused reproachfully. "Think of the fate of this girl, cut off from all her friends."

"Would all her friends desert her then?"

Adrienne coloured. "A woman's good name would suffer if she remained her friend."

"Oh!" said Sibella, shortly; "go on."

"Then, to be practical, what could she do? where could she go to? what would she live upon?—it makes me shiver to think of it! She could not go into a family and teach. Who would take a governess who had run away from her husband?—and what else offers itself to a woman of Viola's training. Have you considered all this? Have you really thought what you are doing?"

"Miss Lancaster, I can only reply that I have your friend's welfare at heart fully as much as you have, and that I have thought of everything. I, and all that I possess, will be at her service. We have each to act as we think best, since we fail to convince one another. As long as I live, Mrs. Dendraith has at least one devoted friend who will never desert her."

And with that assurance, Adrienne had to be content. She left Mrs. Lincoln, with an uncomfortable sense of failure, and walked home vividly thinking.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SHIRT OF NESSUS.

To die, to be unconscious! the longing for it was like a gnawing hunger in the soul.

To be mercifully wafted away into a great silence, where there was no heart-ache, no passions to struggle against, no indignity! Whatever Viola's lips uttered as she knelt in prayer, *that* was the cry of her heart.

The day arrived for dining at Cleveland; a day to which Viola had looked forward with uneasy joy, mingled with dread. Harry would be there! Her nerves quivered; she felt as if she were visibly trembling. The evening found her worn out and haggard with excitement.

"Viola, you have been out so little since our marriage that your wedding-dress must be quite fresh still, especially as you never put it on—in consequence, it would seem, of me having once admired it. I should like you to wear it to-night, and also the diamonds I gave you, which you also appear to despise."

White gown and diamonds were awaiting her when the hour for dressing arrived. The dress lay gleaming on the sofa; the diamonds on the toilet-table. Anything that symbolised her marriage she shrank from touching as if it had been fire. And to-night she must array herself in that glisten-

ing garment, feel it like a shirt of Nessus, close and firm, burning, burning——

"You look well!" said Philip, critically, when his wife appeared in her glistening satin and soft lace; "and the diamonds are very becoming. But you are pale,—however, that is pardonable with dark hair. You wear no flowers; is that from design?"

She looked down at herself.

"You want that finishing touch."

He went and brought some azaleas from the conservatory.

"Here is the very thing—a spray for the dress and a spray for the hair."

He advanced to arrange them for her, but she drew back, scarcely perceptibly, and held out her hands for the flowers.

"Thank you."

Philip turned on his heel, walked over to the other end of the room, and laid them quietly on the fire.

"If you won't take your adornments from me, you can go without. You certainly have a habit of straining at a gnat, my love, having swallowed the camel. You can't bear me to touch you while I fasten in a bunch of flowers." He laughed, looking her in the face with an expression that made her sick with fury. The delicate azalea-petals were shrivelling as he spoke, helpless in the savage hunger of the flames.

The sight was full of parables.

The eyes of husband and wife met.

"Have you not learnt wisdom?" he asked. "Are you always going to play the *rôle* of obstinate child?"

"I am as I was made, and as I was taught," she exclaimed. "I can't adapt myself—I can't alter myself—I am helpless. Things are too much for me; I cannot bear it."

She walked to the window repressing the blinding tears that welled into her eyes.

"My dear, you choose your time for a scene admirably. I hear the carriage just coming round."

Viola was struggling for composure, and dare not trust herself to speak.

"Sulky!" he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "That, I hope, will give way before you join your aunt and her guests. Come, I hear Cupid on his way to announce the carriage. In his presence, at least, don't be emotional, I pray."

The butler (or Cupid, as Philip called him) entered at the auspicious moment, and found the husband helping his wife on with her cloak. Cupid thought his air was most devoted, but to Viola the acts seemed like an assertion of right, the signal of victory, a careless victory, as if he had overcome the will of a tiresome child.

Viola's eyes were quite dry as she took her place beside her husband. He glanced at her, and, seeing that she was calm, settled himself in his corner with a satisfied air.

The irreproachable little brougham trundled along over the

bleak downs, its lamps sending in advance a flying shaft of light chasing the darkness, which closed up behind it as waters close behind a moving ship. Heine might have written a bitter little poem on that well-appointed equippage with its sleek coachman, sleek horses, smart footmen, moving daintily through the darkness discreetly across the wide solitudes with the eternal sea-chant beating through the salt winds of the downs. The mysteries of nature, the mysteries of the human, confronted one another cynically.

Perhaps, after all, a well-appointed brougham and a creditable coachman are matters as deeply mysterious in their way as any we find to ponder upon within the range of nature.

When presently Clevedon came in sight, Viola's heart gave a throb. Harry's face rose up before her and his voice sounded in her ear. The shuttles of her fate were moving fast and furious. Would she have strength to get through the evening, with this iron band clutching her heart, and stopping its beating? She could hardly breathe.

"Mr. and Mrs. Philip Dendraith."

The assembled guests in the drawing-room at Clevedon watched with interest the entry of the newcomers.

"Well, Viola dear! How are you?" said her aunt, cordially. "Cold, I suppose, after your drive; take that chair by the fire. Mrs. Featherstone, I think you know my niece. Oh! yes, of course, you have exchanged calls. This other lady I need not introduce."

The "other lady" was Mrs. Sedley, who had greeted her daughter and given an anxious glance at her pale cheeks.

"Mr. and Mrs. Russel Courtney!"

Arabella was resplendent to-night. She entered with some vivacious remark on her lips, slightly *inapropos* perhaps, but very sparkling. She then serpentined round the room with arching neck, recognizing her friends and emitting exclamations of joy and surprise.

"And Mrs. Sedley! I am so glad to see you again! It seemed as if we were never to meet! I am deeply interested in your daughter, you know. I have quite made myself a nuisance in calling on her so often."

Mrs. Sedley gravely felt sure to the contrary. "Ask Mrs. Dendraith, and she will tell you how I have pestered her," said Arabella. "She is looking rather pale to-night, but the white dress—her wedding-gown, I see, so prettily altered to the fashion—becomes her admirably!" (It clasped her close, burning, burning——)

"What a lot of people there are here to-night; Augusta told me she was going to ask the whole County. I see that delicious Bob Hunter in the other room; and the Pelletts and the Evans party."

Arabella looked all round curiously.

"Of course Sir Philip and Lady Dendraith will be here. Ah! yes, there they come. Oh! do look how Mr. Sedley is

devoting himself to Mrs. Featherstone; *I* should be quite jealous if I were you! I always keep a watchful eye on *my* husband; it is quite necessary. Men are all alike in that way." Arabella laughed—"I don't think we should care for them much if they weren't a little—just a little bit—don't you know?"

"Mrs. Dixie, Miss Lancaster, and Mr. Lancaster!"

"Then you don't care for hunting, Mrs. Dendraith?"

"Hunting, no—I—not hunting—I don't care for hunting—very much."

Mrs. Dixie, entering the room, looked like a schooner in full sail, with her healthy-looking ancestor still at her throat.

Viola presently found herself being shaken by the hand and talked to about something that she did not comprehend; and then she became aware that Adrienne was speaking to her, and then—there was a sort of whirl in the air and a flicker of the candle-light,—and the next moment her hand was in Harry Lancaster's.

And she felt nothing, except this whirl in the air, and this ebb and flow of light. Her hand might have been a block of wood. He was looking at her fixedly,—was it for a second or was it for many seconds? Presently she became conscious that he held it no longer.

She *did* feel something then! Something hot and desperate—a leaping up of the heart, a wild yearning to feel that touch again. What was righteousness duty, heaven, or hell? Nothing, nothing. Be it right or wrong, she cared only for one thing in the whole world, and for *that* she cared madly,—only for ——!"

"Mrs. Dendraith, ahoy!"

From one end of the long room to the other Bob Hunter had half skipped, half skated, across the floor, pulling up opposite to Viola, and bowing low. He then proceeded with perfect gravity to perform a few steps, fixing her intently with his eye, and keeping his body steady, while his legs moved with extreme nimbleness. He seemed to expect her to break into steps likewise, and she even began to fear that he would take her by the hand and insist upon her dancing, perhaps as a substitute for conversation. He knew that she did not understand that difficult art.

She saw Geoffrey on the broad grin, watching the little scene from the fire-place; Mrs. Dixie putting up her eye-glass to observe the conduct of her would-be son-in-law.

Adrienne with flushed cheeks stood beside her, trying to talk to an unwilling neighbour, who wanted to watch Bob Hunter.

That athlete came suddenly to rest, remarking that exercise was better than any tonic.

"Charmed to see you here to-night, Mrs. Dendraith—I address you without ceremony, you see. Ceremony is the bane of genius."

"*You* ought to know Mr. Hunter," said Arabella enchantingly.

Bob Hunter swung round and made her a bow.

Then he swung back again to Viola, and asked her what was the difference between a windmill and a Dutch cheese. Poor Viola blushed distractedly, and said she really had not the slightest idea. There lurked an uneasy fear that he thought of Arabella as the windmill.

"Oh! come now—this is weak," remonstrated young Hunter; "try and think."

"I can't guess riddles," cried Viola; "I never could."

"Use your intellect," urged the tormentor.

"I haven't got one!" exclaimed Viola in desperation, at which Bob gave a chuckle.

"This is becoming serious; I *must* have that riddle answered;" and to Viola's intense relief he danced off to the other side of the room, going from group to group, asking what was the difference between a windmill and a Dutch cheese.

"My court-fool," said Lady Clevedon, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Adrienne gave a curious little movement and a spasmodic smile. The vision of a warmly lighted room with a view of sea through its long windows was before her at that moment; of a dainty figure and a face with curving lips: she seemed to hear in turn quiet words of scorn and irony, words of sympathy, words of defiance. What would Sibella Lincoln think of a woman marrying Bob Hunter in order to be settled in life?

Adrienne frowned, and tried to shake off the recollection. Had the woman whose character could not bear investigation actually been able to make Adrienne Lancaster feel her attitude towards Bob Hunter degrading? The idea of accepting his offer had not been regarded as quite out of the question. To sell herself was therefore not quite out of the question.

"Ah! Mr. Lancaster at last!" exclaimed Arabella; "the hero of the evening! I thought I was never to have a word with you; every one has been crowding round you so. Tell me, *is* it really nice to be a universal favourite?"

"I thought that *you* would have known all about that, Mrs. Courtenay."

"I? Oh dear, no! quite an obscure person. I want to know whether you enjoy being a cynosure—don't you know?"

"A ——?"

"A cynosure of every eye."

"Depends painfully upon the eye, Mrs. Courtenay."

"Oh, you are horrid! You won't give a plain answer to a plain question."

"No, I give a plain answer to a beautiful person."

Mrs. Courtenay wriggled, and Adrienne looked at her

brother in amazement. As Geoffrey said, Arabella would squeeze compliments out of a boot-jack!

"And now, Mr. Lancaster, come and sit down on the sofa, and tell me everything you have been doing since you left us all lamenting. You can't think how dead and alive Upton has been without you!"

"Indeed, Mrs. Courtenay, I can."

"Come, I can't have you conceited; that would be to spoil perfection."

"Am I to regard myself as perfection?"

"Oh no! for then you would no longer be perfect."

"As long as I continue to believe I have faults, I shall know that I remain faultless. It is worth crossing the Irish Channel to discover this!"

"Now, no more *badinage.* I want to hear the serious truth about you. You don't seem in the least ill, Mr. Lancaster; I believe you are a fraud, and just got up a little scare to secure sympathy. Well, you have succeeded in your wicked design, and all the Upton ladies are prepared to make a pet of you, and to insist upon your taking their medicines and going to their doctors. Won't that be nice?"

"Delicious," said Harry.

"That sweet Mrs. Dendraith seemed quite concerned about you. By the way, do you know I have been envying her for getting the first sight of you after your return. She *was* highly favoured"

"I don't know exactly what you mean," said Harry, not without a feeling of suspicion and uneasiness. "I see her to-night for the first time."

"Oh! come, Mr. Lancaster, that won't do!" cried Arabella, laughing. "Why I had it from her own lips! If you wanted to keep it dark, you ought to have engaged her not to tell."

"Still I don't understand," said Harry.

"Well, let's go and ask her about it; she will explain."

"I don't think it's worth explaining; questions of date do not interest me."

"Oh! but this is more than a question of date," said Arabella, meaningly.

But as Harry would not follow her to Viola, she had to content herself with asking how he thought her looking.

"Pretty well," he said.

"She is so very quiet, is she not? I sometimes feel she is not happy. Yet her husband is very nice, and handsome beyond expression."

The announcement of dinner sent people hunting for their appointed partners. Viola was allotted to Dick Evans; nearly opposite to her sat Geoffrey radiantly happy by the side of Adrienne Lancaster. Adreinne had been conducted by Bob Hunter in his maddest humour. Viola saw that he was proposing to her at intervals during dinner; poor Geoffrey's

happiness fearfully diminishing as he became aware of these untoward circumstances.

Harry Lancaster and his Fate Arabella were also on the opposite side of the table. Mrs. Dixie had been introduced to an old gentleman called Bavage whose name she caught imperfectly, but whom she at once claimed to have met twenty years before, and so worked upon the feelings of Mr. Bavage that he too had recollections of that far-off divine event.

"The name of Savage revives many old memories," said Mrs. Dixie, pensively; whereupon Mr. Bavage mentioned that *Pixie* was a name almost as familiar as his own, and so they went on mistaking one another in the most complicated manner for two other people whom they had not met for years.

Now and then Viola caught sight of Harry in animated conversation with Miss Featherstone.

Miss Featherstone was cold and calm and fashionable, and Viola found herself growing more and more antipathetic towards the hard handsome face.

Loneliness was not a new sensation to Viola, but as she glanced round the table at the rows of polite faces, she thought that never in her life before had she felt so friendless.

Harry was there, yes, but it might have been his ghost: he had neither look nor word for her now! Well, no matter!

Nothing could matter any more. That was one comfort. Things had come to a climax; old faiths had been shaken, cherished principles held from childhood were growing dim; in thought she could sink no lower; heaven had drifted out of sight. She loved guiltily—it had come to that!—and she loved in vain.

Viola caught the admiring eyes of her adorer Dorothy fixed upon her, and turned away her own with a sickening sense of shame and misery.

"O Dorothy, if you knew!"

Dick Evans was talkative. He told Viola all about some interesting excavations that were being made upon the barrows in the downs, and he wanted to know if she really would not be persuaded to go for walks with him again. What was the objection? Did her husband think Dick would run away with her?

"Heavens knows!" said Viola.

"You look as if you wanted exercise," pursued Dick. "I don't mean that you had better run away with me on that account. You seem paler than you used to be."

"Do you think I am going to die?" she asked with a little laugh.

"Oh no, no; only you ought to be careful of yourself."

"What have I to be careful of?"

Dick looked at her. "What is the matter with you to-night? You are not like yourself."

That evening's conversation brought Dick to the conclusion

that women are flighty sort of creatures, not to be counted upon as understood; that they don't quite know what they want, or if they do, by some strange perversity of nature, they refuse to take it when they get the chance. There is something not quite sane, he thought, about even the best of women. A little further down the table, sublimely ignorant of the many little dramas that were being acted around him, sat old Mr. Pellett, who had been rapt still warm from his studies, and brought, much against his will, to join the festive gathering. He was in a state of absent-minded amiability, listening very humbly and a little bashfully to the remarks of a young lady of seventeen who was talking to him about lawn-tennis. Mr. Pellett in Upton society was a truly pathetic figure.

On her left, Viola had a grey-headed person who appreciated a good dinner, and a young woman who forebore to nag him with trivial chatter during the sacred hour. She was therefore often at liberty to watch the others and to busy herself with her own excited thoughts. Once or twice, looking up suddenly, she would find Harry's eyes fixed upon her as if he had been exerting over her some subtle magnetic power.

There was an expression in his face that set her heart beating furiously; he used to look so in the old days.

The next moment he was relating some anecdote to his neighbour which created a shout of laughter; Philip capped it with a second and Mr. Sedley with a third, Bob Hunter bringing the series to a climax and setting the whole table in a roar.

Mrs. Sedley sat in her black dress gravely looking on, and wondering why every one was laughing. Her face was deadly white, and there were deep black lines under the eyes. She had told her husband before starting that she felt almost too unwell to accompany him to-night, but he had insisted on her coming, and as the painfulness of the ordeal induced her to regard it as a duty, she gave in. Once an intervening head was moved aside, and Viola caught sight of her mother's suffering face. In an instant there was a rush of fear and shame at her own unholy thoughts. What unspeakable grief there would be, if the mother knew how the daughter had changed in these two short years! Was there nothing in this world for her but sorrow and disappointment? Her sons had caused her shame and grief, and her daughter—? Scarcely half an hour ago that daughter had been ready to fling over everything on earth, for the sake of a lawless passion which Marian Sedley's child ought not even to know the meaning of.

Roars of laughter awakened the echoes of the old dining-room. Except Mrs. Sedley's, there was not a single grave face at the table. Her husband was talking about the peculiar attractions of widows, and their extreme fondness for the "dear departed." "A man never knows how devoted his

wife is to him till he dies," said Philip; "it must be sweet to die."

"Death is undoubtedly the great whitewasher," Harry asserted.

"Or the great endearer," suggested Adrienne.

"He that would be loved, let him make haste to die," said Harry.

"We shall all be loved some day! Let us be thankful!" cried Bob Hunter.

Dorothy Evans shook her head vigorously. Her brother saw that she had Mrs. Pellett in her mind's eye.

"I am sure there are *some* people that one *couldn't* love even after they were dead!" announced the young woman.

"My dear!" remonstrated Mrs. Pellett.

"Not if they died ten times over," said Dorothy, with increasing conviction.

"My dear child, so unchristian!"

"Not if they didn't wake up at the sound of the last trump!" she added, doggedly piling up the agony. "You would feel everlastingly grateful to them for dying, but you could never love them—*never!*"

"Perhaps you don't know how to love, Dorothy," said Dick with a half-warning smile.

"Oh! don't I?" said Dorothy with a glance at Viola.

"Do you love *me*, Miss Dorothy?" enquired Philip indolently. "Man and wife are one, you know, so you ought to do so."

"No, no, I don't," said Dorothy briefly.

"Would you love me if I were dead?"

"No."

"Can you imagine any circumstances in which you would entertain that feeling towards me?"

"Nobody ever loved anybody who asked questions," Dorothy retorted.

"I feel crushed," said Philip; "it is evidently time for me to die."

"Then why don't you do it?" asked the ruthless one beneath her breath.

He caught the words and laughed.

"All in good time, cruel but fair one," he said.

Mrs. Sedley, who was leaning back in her chair, saying nothing, made a slight spasmodic movement, but no one noticed it.

"Don't talk of dying in that flippant manner," said Lady Clevedon; "it is uncanny."

When she gave the signal to the ladies, Mrs. Sedley rose with an effort, and moved from the table giddily. She recovered herself, however, and passed into the drawing-room with the others. Viola characteristically lingered behind, allowing more self-confident ladies to precede her, and alas! by the tactics falling into the clutches of the ever-watchful Mrs.

Pellett, who took her by the arm encouragingly, and led her out with the faintly rustling procession.

In the drawing-room every one drew round the fire, and began to talk, chiefly of local matters and domestic details.

"You are not well to-night, Marian," said Lady Clevedon, leading her sister-in-law to a low chair.

"Not quite well," Mrs. Sedley confessed.

Viola had deserted Mrs. Pellett, and was standing by her mother's side.

"It is nothing," said Mrs. Sedley, catching sight of her daughter's face. "I often feel so—very often."

Viola tried to persuade her to go home at once.

"Oh! dear, no, your father would be annoyed; I shall soon be all right—if you will hand me that bottle of smelling-salts."

Viola gave it and repeated her persuasions, saying that she would return with her mother to the Manor.

But it was of no avail. Mrs. Sedley was determined to remain and suffer to the end.

"Only another hour and a half," she said with a faint smile.

The other ladies, having discussed all local matters, were now engaged upon a recent scandal which had been making a stir in the fashionable world.

Viola was sitting apart, pale and exhausted with excitement.

"O Mrs. Dendraith," cried Arabella, "you lost that anecdote; it is for your private ear—quite too shocking to relate in public."

"I fear it will be wasted on me," said Viola, shrinking back.

"Oh! you can't fail to enjoy it; it is really too good, isn't it, Miss Featherstone?"

Viola drew away quickly. "Please don't trouble, Mrs. Courtenay; I hate such stories." She said it with such a fierce vigour that there was an awkward silence among the ladies, the silence that always falls when any strong expression of opinion is given in society. Viola set her lips, as she played with the blade of a paper-knife, and felt a wild impulse to hurt physically these well-dressed complacent beings who seemed incapable of being hurt in any other way. It was incredible to Viola that women could be so vulgar and so ignoble. Presently Bob Hunter appeared as forerunner of his colleagues, who were lingering over their wine.

Viola's heart began to throb. At last Harry Lancaster came into the room and was immediately waylaid by Sir Philip and by Mrs. Featherstone. He seemed to be in a lively vein to-night, for wherever he went there was a stir and a burst of laughter. Viola had to clutch her paper-knife very tightly to prevent herself from visibly trembling.

"O Mr. Lancaster," Mrs. Courtenay was saying, "I have heard such shocking things about you! I hope they aren't true."

"I hope not, I am sure," said Harry.

"I hear that you call upon this dreadful Mrs. Lincoln who has come to live here. I tell Sir Philip it is encouraging immorality to let her rent his house."

"Clearly," said Harry, "any one who lets his house connives at the misdeeds of his tenant, past, present, and future."

"No, but really," urged Mrs. Featherstone, "I think it is so bad for the neighbourhood. I hope you haven't been weak enough to call upon her."

"It is very kind of you to take so much interest in me," said Harry. "You can't imagine me frequenting any but the most irreproachable society, I hope. Are not *your* severe doors open to me?"

"Oh, I'm not so particular about my *men*," retorted Mrs. Featherstone, with a laugh. "I used to know Mrs. Lincoln a little before the scandal. I can't imagine what she comes here for. The man she ran away with is dead, isn't he?"

At this moment, Viola, who had been receiving the homage of Dorothy Evans, was sitting alone on a sofa, Dorothy being summoned by her mother to have her sash rearranged, it having characteristically worked round from the back to the front without interference from the wearer.

Harry managed to break away from Arabella and went straight to the vacated seat.

"I thought I was never to have a word with you," he said in a low hurried voice. "There seems a fate against it."

Philip's eyes were resting on them.

"I want to give you a letter presently; don't start: look as if I were telling you that the weather in Ireland for the last month has been extremely changeable. The letter is from Mrs. Lincoln, not from me. You never in your life had a more sincere friend than she is. The shock-headed little girl who has just left you is equally sincere, perhaps, but not more so. I met them both, and oh! Viola, do as Mrs. Lincoln asks you."

She raised her eyes to his for a moment. Suddenly her head swam; she grasped the back of the sofa, breathing quickly.

"What is in the letter?"

"There is no opportunity to tell you now; I shall be suspected. Viola, one word or sign"—Harry bent towards her with his elbow on his knee, his hand half hiding his face. "Drop your handkerchief for 'yes,' touch the lace on your dress for 'no.'"

There was a rustle of silk close beside them. Viola gave a little gasp.

"However, we had plenty of gaiety," said Harry in a conversational tone; "the Irish are a very hospitable people."

By this time Mrs. Pellett had passed on.

"Now for my question, Viola. Do you trust me, and will you do as Mrs. Lincoln asks in this letter?"

She dropped her handkerchief, and Harry stooped to pick it up.

Mrs. Russel Courtenay was approaching.

"And Mr. Evans really is thinking of restoring this church? I hope they won't make a gaudy monstrosity of the old place. I don't like restorations."

Harry rose to give up his place to Mrs. Courtenay.

"Oh! please don't rise; you two looked so comfortable and happy there, I wouldn't disturb you for the world."

"Thank you. Well, we *were* very comfortable and happy, as you say," said Harry, who had become rather white, "but our happiness would be still greater if Mrs. Courtenay would bestow upon us the light of her countenance."

"Flatterer, avaunt!" with a cursory gaze at Viola's pale cheeks.

"Mr. Lancaster," she said impressively, "I don't believe your polite speeches."

The two looked for a second in one another's eyes.

"Scepticism, Mrs. Courtenay, is the curse of the century."

"Oh! there are other curses besides scepticism," said Mrs. Courtenay; "things, for instance, are coming to a dreadful pass in society—people running away from their husbands, and all that sort of thing. You know this case that's in all the papers! Really it makes one wonder who is to be trusted, as if one might expect one's nearest and dearest to be in the divorce court to-morrow. I am quite unhappy about it, I really am."

"That's very good of you," said Harry.

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Lancaster. Do you know"—Arabella lowered her voice—"Mrs. Dendraith got quite angry when we were discussing this divorce. Well, it is very horrid—she is so good and sweet, is she not?"—a pause—"don't you think so, Mr. Lancaster?" Arabella repeated.

"That follows from her set," he said with a sort of jaded politeness.

"Oh, will you never cease these flatteries?"

"England expects every man to do his duty——".

"Mr. Lancaster, I don't think I like you to-night. I believe you are tired of me, and want Mrs. Dendraith to yourself. Well, I will not detain you." She looked into his eyes as she said it, and then swept away, leaving Harry watching her with an absorbed expression.

"She guesses," he said to himself. "Well, I have to play a game against the world—an Arabella more or less makes but little difference. One can't cheat these carrion crows of their natural food." He returned to Viola, keeping a watchful eye on Philip and Arabella. He began to talk about different matters, and then, without change of attitude or manner, he said, "Will you take the letter?"

She looked at her mother. Harry bent closer.

"Viola!" he repeated in a pleading tone. She gave a sign of assent. "I will put it into your hand as we say 'good-night.' It is very small; be careful not to drop it. There are many suspicious eyes around us. Burn the letter as soon as you have read it."

"We are being watched," said Viola, nervously.

"I will leave you," returned Harry; "but as soon as you get an opportunity, go into the conservatory—it is cool and pleasant; you are looking very tired."

He left her without further hint.

After a few minutes of conflict with herself, she rose and entered the conservatory. The cool green of the leaves and the sound of dripping water were grateful indeed to her tired nerves. She sank into a low chair, and a sensation of languor crept over her; a longing to give herself up to her fate, to resist and strive no longer. Soft music crept in from the drawing-room: Adrienne was singing a gondolier's song, rhythmic and indolent. Viola heaved a deep, long sigh and lay back among the cushions. The tears of pleasure and relief welled up under her closed eyelids.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"DAUGHTER OF THE ENDLESS NIGHT."

THE music mercifully did not cease, and Viola lay there like a tired child resting.

It was no surprise to her when presently a figure stood by her side and a voice sounded in her ear. She did make one desperate effort to escape the danger of this interview, but Harry laid a hand upon her arm and she was helpless.

"There is no time to lose," he said; "let me give you the letter while I have the chance. It is to ask you to meet Mrs. Lincoln at Caleb Foster's to-morrow. Caleb is a friend of Mrs. Lincoln, and he is absolutely trustworthy. Gossip is impossible to him. And now I want you to think deeply over our position. Everything depends on you. We—Sibella and I—are ready to take all risks. But we can do nothing unless you help us."

"Why was I ever born!" she exclaimed.

"Don't despair," he said gently, taking her hand. "No one need despair who is loved as you are loved."

She turned away.

"Viola, be reasonable. My love for you is now, as it has always been, the homage of my whole being; it is of the real and lasting kind, and it is ready—it has shown itself ready—for sacrifice. Why should you shrink from it?"

She was pressing her hands over her eyes to force back the tears of joy. He loved her still—her fears were unfounded—the horrible loneliness was gone. The sense of wrong, for the moment, was drowned in the flood of joy and relief.

"I am not pleading now for myself; I want you to understand that you have at your service one who is ready to risk anything for you, but who would despise himself if he tried to build up a claim upon you through that service."

(If she might only tell him!)

"But I do want you to ask yourself if such a love as mine *can* be a wrong to any woman? if mere external circumstances can turn right into wrong in a breath? Is it reasonable that a man who has wounded and insulted you should be able to claim your allegiance for ever, while a word of love from me must be repulsed as if it were a deadly sin?"

He was kneeling beside her, clasping her hands, though she made a spell-bound effort at resistance. Some instinct seemed instinct to hint to him that his words no longer fell on stony ground.

She shivered at his touch.

"Love is its own justification. Everyone capable of real love *knows* that it is."

"If all thought that—ah! don't touch me, I can't think when you touch me—if all believed that, everything would fall into confusion."

He leant forward eagerly.

"And do you really think that society rests safe and sound upon its foundations of misery and martyred affection?"

"I don't know what to think or say. If your ideas are right, what becomes of loyalty and truth?"

Harry looked at her for a moment in mournful silence.

Sibella's words still rang in his ears: "Such a woman is foredoomed. We cannot save her." Was it true? He felt a gloomy foreboding that it was. The past seemed to be too strong for her, the attitude of feeling to be changelessly fixed, in spite of all the suffering she had endured.

"Adrienne says I ought to obey the call of duty, to regard myself as placed and dedicated for life. I am Philip's wife; I can't get out of that, can I? I can't get out of the obligations which it implies, however terrible they may be—except by shirking."

"Listen to me, Viola; if there is such a thing as justice, I say that no woman is morally bound to a man when she is married to him as *you* were married to your husband. You do no good to anyone by submission. You only add to the anguish of other women in your own position, and of men in mine."

To her, the words seemed full of the sophistry of passion, they made her heart beat, tempting and at the same time repelling. Emotion and the ingrained results of long train-

ing were in deadly conflict. The heart stirred beneath its crust of acquired sentiment.

Harry began to wonder whether after all it would not have been wiser to leave Viola with her convictions undisturbed. It seemed a hopeless task to free her from them so entirely that she would be ready for action. And without action, it was worse than useless—so far as her own fate was concerned—to see clearly. Just in proportion to the additional knowledge would the suffering increase.

"Viola," he said, "you make me fear that after all I have only added to your misfortunes, instead of serving you."

"You have saved me from suffering quite alone. Adrienne is good and kind and a true friend, but, oh! she does not know, she does not understand."

"If only I could take you away from all this misery, and comfort you and heal you as only the ministries of love can heal! Will you not come with me? I plead for something more than life."

"And I," said Viola, "have something more than life to defend."

"And how will you defend it? By remaining the wife of a man you do not love?"

"You torture me!"

He took her hand and kissed it.

"Viola, do you love me?"

She hesitated.

In a moment he had drawn her to him and laid her head upon his shoulder. She could not move without a strong effort, and she did not make the effort. She seemed half stupified. He stooped and kissed her on her lips, and Viola knew that her fate, whatever it might be, was sealed.

"I was certain this would come some day, but it seems too wonderful to be true."

Two or three never-forgotten moments of silence passed, and then Viola said, with a sigh: "But this can only bring unhappiness." She tried to rise, but he held her tightly.

"Don't talk to me of unhappiness when I hold you for the first time in my arms, and know that you love me! You will come with me, Viola," he pleaded, "you will hesitate no longer."

"Oh, let met go! let me go! You mesmerise me—you bewitch me; I did not mean to give way like this; I am lightheaded; life is too hard for me—I can't cope with it—it's temtations are terrible."

"Thank heaven that you feel them! Now it all seems plain to me. You will not sacrifice everything to mere prejudice any longer. You care for the *thing*, not the *name;* you care for the honor that the heart recognizes, not the honor of the world. It may be good to suffer martyrdom, but your cause must be worth the sacrifice. What *you* are asked to suffer

for—though it counts its martyrs by the thousand -is not worthy of the sacrifice."

"But I have fears, so many fears," said Viola. "You want me to leave my husband. That means to disgrace my family."

"Who have deliberately sacrificed you to their worldly interests——"

"My mother believed she was acting for the best; as for my father, he only did what hundreds of parents are doing every day."

"I think it is high time the other hundreds had their eyes opened a little," muttered Harry.

"It would break my mother's heart," said Viola. "I cannot do it—it is impossible! And my father—my brothers."

"Viola!" he pleaded, taking her hand and drawing her towards him, "you think of everybody except the one person who loves you more than all the rest put together—a thousand times more. It would break my heart to lose you, and to know of your wretchedness; but you never think of that. Perhaps if I had destroyed the happiness of your childhood and handed you over to misery for life, you might be careful about *my* heart too. As it is, I suppose I must expect always to come last."

"O Harry! you know I am struggling with temptation, struggling to do right—but all these ideas are so new to me, so appalling!"

"I suppose it would surprise you to hear that to me that the *old* ideas are appalling. Why will you not act? Sibella and I are pledged to support you and protect you through thick and thin."

"I understand that; you are both far too generous and too good to me. Why should you trouble to rescue a foolish woman who has not the strength of mind either to submit silently to her fate or to break free from it bodily?"

"We do it because we love her," said Harry. "Will she not make us happy by consenting to put herself in our faithful hands?"

Viola shook her head.

"I dare not—I dare not—for my mother's sake. I don't fear anything for myself, but for her; no, I dare not."

"Is that your sole reason?"

"I only know that while she lives, I must endure it as best I may. I *cannot* deal her such a crushing blow! She would die—indeed she would!"

As the last words were uttered, Adrienne entered the conservatory hastily.

"Viola, dear," she said, "will you come with me? Your mother is going home; she feels unwell and wishes you to know."

"Unwell!" Viola turned pale and hastened away.

"I am afraid it's serious," Adrienne said in a low voice to her brother as she passed out.

Mrs. Sedley was lying on a sofa in her sister-in-law's *boudoir*, whence Lady Clevedon had banished every one but Adrienne and her own maid.

"What is it? what is it?" cried Viola.

"I think it is a bad faint," said her aunt; "she is much better now."

Mrs. Sedley was struggling for breath.

"Take me home, Viola——" she gasped.

"I don't think you ought to be moved till you are better, Marion," said Lady Clevedon.

Mrs. Sedley's brows contracted painfully.

"Take me home," she repeated.

"Very well, you should go if you wish it. Gibson, will you go and ask Mrs. Sedley's coachman to get his horses in as soon as he possibly can, and tell James to ride over and ask the doctor to go at once to the Manor-House?"

Before the carriage arrived, Mrs. Sedley seemed a little better, so that, when her husband came in to know what was the matter, she was just able to answer cheerfully that it was only a fainting fit, and that she was almost well again now.

"I am sorry to hurry you away, but I am so afraid of being laid up away from home. If Philip will allow her, Viola is coming back with me."

Adrienne had gone to tell Philip what had happened, and she returned with a gracious message of permission to his wife to accompany her mother home. Adrienne laid an accent on the word *permission*, as implying a right and dutiful spirit on the part of Viola, and commendable relations between husband and wife.

The stars were all ablaze as the ramshackle old vehicle trundled homewards across the downs. Mrs. Sedley lay back with closed eyes, Viola beside her, while Mr. Sedley and Geoffrey sat opposite, occasionally speaking in undertones. Mr. Sedley had begun with his usual bawl; but on Viola's remonstrance, he had reduced himself to a hoarse whisper, scarcely less trying to the nerves. One of the windows was open, admitting breaths of soft air imbued with the sweetness of early spring. Holding her mother's hand, Viola sat looking out into the night.

Creeds, doctrines, social laws—all seemed to lose form and substance in that wild darkness; they trembled and waned when brought thus face to face with nature—face to face with the inexorable facts and the unutterable sadness of life.

Harry was right—these stars, this darkness, that unappeasable sea confirmed him; this pain, this failure and disappointment, confirmed him. He pinned his faith to realities, to the great Facts and Passions of our Life, and he flung conventions to the winds. He would have *things*, not names; only people

renowned for common-sense are mad enough to lay down their lives for the sake of words and phrases, to bid farewell to love, happiness, all the sweetest things of life, at the bidding of a shadow.

Viola shivered with foreboding. In the dim starlight all the occupants of the carriage looked strange and white, but her mother's face was ghastly. Death seemed to be already of the party. They could feel his presence among them. The pain-stricken, toilsome, joyless existence was nearing its end. It might be a matter of months, or of weeks, but the end was in sight. The brutal, pitiless demon of human destiny was about to put his last touch to the ugly work. And now to Viola, for the first time since her earliest childhood, Death seemed awful, instead of beneficient.

For the first time, almost in his very presence, her heart rose in passionate anger against him and his clumsy solution of the human problem—destruction in default of cure. A vision of the glory and splendour of life was in her heart. She felt desperate for very pity as she gazed at the white face of the woman who had never known that glory even for a moment. To have lived for all these years and tasted so few joys! To have known nothing but care, anxiety, self-denial, cruel suffering and disappointment; and nothing but ill-treatment from the man for whom all had been endured: to lose one's life thus, and at last to die and leave no passionate regret in any heart, to be forgotten just because of the meek dutifulness which left no room for the more vivid qualities which gave colour to the personality and attract the love of others, even though they be more like faults than virtues! Would she find in Heaven the love that she had missed on earth? If not, she had missed love for all eternity; she had missed everything—life itself; she was like a blind person in a world of colour, one deaf in a realm of music. And to complete the irony of it all, the moral that the child was drawing now from her mother's waning life stood in direct opposition to every principle for which that painful life had been given wholesale, as a willing sacrifice to God and Duty.

There was a solitary oil-lamp burning in the hall when they arrived at the Manor-House. The place struck chill as one entered, and had the musty scent of old rooms seldom visited by the sunlight.

After Mrs. Sedley had been carried upstairs and laid in the great four-post bedstead, the watchers began to look anxiously for the arrival of the doctor. When he did come, hope seemed for the moment to revive. He had attended the family since Mrs. Sedley came to the Manor-House a bride; and they all looked to him for help in time of trouble. He was a grave man, with iron-grey hair and beard. With much solemnity, he felt the patient's pulse, asked a few questions, and then sat down to write a prescription.

When he left, Viola followed him from the room.

"Tell me the truth, doctor," she said.

He looked at her doubtfully.

"I want to know if there is any hope."

"Well, then, there is not," he answered quietly. "There has been no hope for the last year and a half; the disease that your mother is suffering from has been coming on for a long time, but with her usual stoicism she said nothing about it until it was too late. She begged me so urgently not to reveal the truth to any of her family that I yielded, not seeing what good it would do you to know."

Viola had turned aside, sick at heart. Life was one long tragedy. "Then my mother has known for a year and a half that she was dying?"

"Yes; and she suspected the truth some time before that. She has had trouble in her day, and that has hastened the mischief; in fact, I believe has induced it. But your mother has no fear of death—she is a sincere Christian, and can face it without flinching."

"And nothing can be done?" asked Viola, ignoring the consolation.

"Nothing can be done, I am sorry to say, except to relieve some of the suffering."

Viola turned hastily away.

"Thank you," she said, "thank you for telling me the truth."

* * * * * * * *

Two anxious days passed. Lady Clevedon drove over to help in the nursing, but Mrs. Sedley would not hear of it. A trained nurse was procured to relieve Viola; and then commenced long days of anguished watching. The suffering became more and more acute, till, at last, day and night there was no rest, scarcely a moment's respite from pain.

"Oh! can't you give something to relieve it?" Viola used to ask the docter, with desperate eyes.

"I have done what I can. There is one other strong remedy, but that would hasten the end. We must not do anything to anticipate by a second that appointed moment. It would not be right."

The same answer was given each time that Viola renewed her appeal. She felt at last a passionate hatred of that stolid word "right."

"I detest people who think more of doing right than of being merciful!" she exclaimed in exasperation, unconscious what a mental resolution the words revealed. She had been sitting for eight hours by her mother's bed-side, watching the paroxysms of anguish, helpless to relieve them.

The doctor took her outburst quite calmly, merely giving orders that Mrs. Sedley should be tended more constantly by the nurse for the future, and that Mrs. Dendraith should be with her mother only for two or three hours at a time.

"You will make yourself ill if you are not careful," he said.

"What does that matter?"

"One patient in a house is quite enough; besides, you could not then nurse your mother at all."

Viola gave in.

Visitors now began to come from far and near to enquire for Mrs. Sedley. Adrienne, always to be found where there was trouble and her help might be needed, often managed to drive over to the Manor-House to relieve Viola, and to cheer her.

Mrs. Evans lent her a pony carriage, which sometimes Harry, sometimes Dorothy, used to drive. On several occasions, when Adrienne had gone upstairs to see Mrs. Sedley, Viola and Harry found themselves alone. But not a word passed between them about their interview at Clevedon, not a word about Sibella, except on Harry's part when he delivered a letter from her expressing regret and sympathy.

Once Viola came down, looking white and almost desperate.

"Your mother's suffering is worse!" Harry exclaimed, coming over to her and laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, it is too horrible! How can she live through it? The power of human endurance is ghastly! Why can't people die before it comes to this? The doctor says there is a struggle between a strong constitution and a determined disease. The disease has got the upper hand, but they are fighting it out—and we can do nothing—nothing, but wait for the certain victory of the disease!" She sank upon the nearest chair, with a gesture of exhaustion, lying back for a moment with closed eyes.

Harry bent down and kissed the thin little hand as it lay passively upon her knee. It trembled, and she drew it away.

"When they know there's no hope," she said presently, "when they know it is merely an affair of days or weeks, why don't they give the sufferer everything and anything that will put an end to the torture, though it *does* shorten the life by a few days? What can it matter?"

"What, indeed!"

"If I knew what that medicine was, I would give it myself," Viola said, rising excitedly. "Why not, why not? If only the doctor would consent to give it, and mother to take it!" But she shook her head with a hopeless sigh.

"I fear it is impossible," said Harry. "The doctor would never consent! He is like all the rest of us, very respectful of the last few laboured breaths when existence is only a torture, but careless how the life-stream is poisoned—while there is yet the precious gift of health to save! That is just our characteristic way of doing things!—Viola, you are worn out—you are killing yourself!" Harry exclaimed, hastening to her side, for she looked as if she were about to faint.

"Not I," she said, "I wish to Heaven I were! That would solve the whole problem; I know no other solution"

"*I* do!" said Harry, in a low voice.

"Don't!" she exclaimed, turning away with an expression almost approaching to dislike. "I am inconsistent, I know; but in *this* house such words seem to burn and brand my very soul—even to see you, makes me feel—oh!—if you only knew how hateful it all is to me!—to think of my mother upstairs, dying, trusting me absolutely, believing in me absolutely—and to meet you like this—under her roof, in this room, after—after what has passed; I must not do it—if I could tell you the anguish of self-contempt that I feel when I think of it all!"

She was standing by the window, with her arm raised to her head in very desperation.

"You still feel my love—our love—to be guilty, then?" he said, not daring to approach.

"Oh yes!—no—I don't know what I feel—but I can't talk of it now! Oh! why did you disturb the certainty of my belief? Why did you throw me into horrible conflict like this? I have nothing now to cling to! When I follow the old faith, I no longer feel calmly certain that I am right. I seem to be like the doctor and the rest of them—sacrificing others to my prejudice, to the good of my foolish soul; but if for a moment I dare to adopt your ideas, then the old feeling comes rushing back torrent-like; my mother's spirit seems to stand before me, pleading, exhorting, reproaching, and then—then I fling the sweet, hideous temptation from me, as I would hurl away some venomous serpent."

It struck Harry, as he watched her and listened to her with bleeding heart, that she was a symbol of the troublous age in which she lived, a creature with weakened, uprooted faith, yet with feelings and instincts still belonging to the past, still responding to the old dead-and-gone dogmas. Harry felt appalled at the conflict he had raised. Sibella with her keen insight had partly foreseen it.

Not without a severe struggle with himself Harry promised Viola that he would not come here again, since his presence caused her so much pain; and he was rewarded by seeing a shade cross her face.

"Yes, it is better," she said, shaking her head angrily, to throw off the inconsistent feeling of disappointment; "it will be much better."

"Then this is to be our last meeting for some time." He paused irresolutely. "Come out with me into the garden. We will drop all difficult and painful topics. I will not distress you in any way if I can help it. Whatever else we may be to one another, we are at any rate two human beings in a mysterious and disastrous world—ignorant of our fate—ignorant of pretty nearly everything, except 'that grief stalks the earth and sits down at the feet of each by turns,' as some Greek poet says. On that ground, at any rate, we may meet without a sense of guilt, whatever be our creeds!" He opened the low window, and together they passed from the

musty smells and dimness of the damp old drawing-room into the radiance of a sweet spring morning.

The May-blossom was not yet out, but every tree and bush was sprinkled with tender green; the tangled shrubberies were alive with tiny leaves. Overhead, the windows of Mrs. Sedley's bed-room stood open to admit the sunshine and the balmy air.

Hearing footsteps on the gravel, Adrienne came to the window and looked out.

"What a perfect morning! Viola, you look like the genius of the spring in your white dress."

"Oh, if you only knew, what would you think?" Viola inwardly exclaimed.

"And what do *I* look like?" inquired Harry.

"Oh, you look like a prosaic sort of summer," said Adrienne; "one can't expect to look symbolic in tweeds. Harry, I wish you would go and get me some cowslips—I see myriads of them in the park."

"All right; will you come too, Mrs. Dendraith?" She assented.

The cowslips grew, as Adrienne had said, in myriads. Viola found herself taking more pleasure in the simple occupation of heaping them into her basket than she could have believed possible, considering the burdens that lay on her heart. How often in the old days had she and Geoffrey and Bill Dawkins gone wild over the cowslips, and the wonders of the spring! How sweet they were! how their very scent spoke of simple and innocent delight and the wonder of childhood! The throb of bewildered misery ceased under the gentle ministry of sunshine and flowers, and the unspeakable freshness of the rejoicing meadows!

When a vast bunch of cowslips had been amassed, the clean yellow trunk of a felled tree was chosen for a resting-place, where the chequered shade of young limes tempered the sunshine. It was the site of Viola's little sylvan temple of the days of yore: here the ruthless Thomas had stood with his pruning-knife to desecrate and destroy; and now the little wood, once more in festival array, was chanting its song of spring, forgetful of the freight of the years. Harry saw that a more peaceful look had come into Viola's face, as her eyes wandered over the meadows and followed the movements of the white hurried clouds.

She lay back resting, with a look in her eyes as if they were seeing something beyond the clouds and the blue of the heavens. The look was not one of joy, but there was neither fear nor grief in it. It was calm and penetrating. She and Fate seemed to be looking into one another's eyes steadfastly. Motionless and silent she lay thus, apparently unconscious of the flight of time. The birds began to come close to the two still fingers, and a couple of squirrels bounded after one another up the nearest tree, chattering and crying excitedly,

"When I was a little girl," Viola said at length, scarcely moving from her position, "I had a temple here; the walls were made of briony and the pillars of eglantine. The high altar was an ivy bush, and for incense I had the breath of flowers. I did not know it then, but it was the Temple of Life. There were symbols for everything, and I think I was dimly conscious of it even then. Roses I carried in handfuls to my shrine, and as the seasons went by, all the sweetest flowers of the field—honeysuckle and wild briar and violets; and then for splendour, scarlet poppies; and for love and constancy, forget-me-nots; and for happiness, the big wide-eyed daisies of the cornfields. I had also the enchanter's night-shade, which meant witchcraft or fascination. And then there were dead leaves in shoals for melancholy, and the harebell for grief, and for faith the passion-flower. She paused for a moment and then went on with a still more dreamy look in her eyes, a still more dreamy calmness in her voice:

"And I worshipped in that temple: at church on Sundays I prayed; but before my own little woodland altar, I adored. It is hard to explain in words what it was I worshipped: I worshipped the earth and all that is in it; I worshipped the loveliness of Life.

"One day when I came to my shrine the beautiful temple was in the dust. I found Thomas with his knife cutting the ivy and laying low the walls of eglantine. The high altar was flung down.

"After that I had to live without a temple or an altar. Once thrown down, they can never be set up again; the deed is done forever; the sacredness has gone, and all new temples are half shams. And all that, item by item, happened to me afterwards in life. It was a prophecy. Now I have no temple."

A squirrel on a branch above peered curiously and timidly at the speaker and then darted up the tree in hot haste.

"I think that I knew, child as I was, what was coming. It seems as if the shadow of Fate had been always upon me."

"The wing of Azrael," Harry muttered beneath his breath with a cruel sinking of the heart. Then he roused himself.

"But that is fatalism, Viola; you must not let the fancy paralyse you. Make your will into a circumstance dominating all the rest."

"There are big powers at work," she said, still in the same dreamy tone. "I can see the wave of Destiny rolling in centuries old, high, resistless, unbroken, my will and yours mere pebbles on the shore— Hush! Do you hear that?"

She raised herself and sat listening. Harry knew what she meant. It was the deep woful sound in the breaking of the waves.

He tried to persuade her that it was inevitable in certain

states of the weather, and that he had heard it often when no disaster had followed.

"Disaster will follow this" said Viola; "I feel it. I don't mean about mother. What has to come soon to her will be no disaster, but a release. There is something else coming."

Harry felt with an inward shudder that this was only too probable. Matters could not continue long as they were, but what turn were they to take? That was the dreadful question. With a woman of Viola's temperament, there was much to be feared. She had not the habit of good-fortune.

Viola presently rose abruptly.

"It is time to go."

"And must I not come again?" he asked wistfully, taking her hand and looking at her with pleading eyes. As they stood thus they became aware of a stealthy footstep behind them. Their hands parted and Philip stood before them smiling.

Viola turned very white, but she did not move.

Harry's attitude was quietly defiant.

"I have been to the house expecting to find you with your mother, my dear" said Philip; "Miss Lancaster, however, has taken your place. It is very kind of Miss Lancaster."

"I was just going in," said Viola.

"Ah, I thought very likely, when I first saw you, that it would turn out that you were just going in. I have come to propose to stay a day or two here. I thought you would miss me if we were parted so long." This with a brilliant smile. "Shall we stroll back together?"

Philip did not allow the conversation to flag for a moment, and when Harry and Adrienne were sitting, ready to start, in the pony-carriage, he said affably that he hoped they would soon drive over again and see them.

"You may be sure I shall come whenever I can," said Adrienne as they went off.

Philip and Viola stood watching them down the carriage-drive.

"Pious occupation, nursing one's mother," said Philip, twirling his stick.

Viola did not answer.

"You are a deeper young person than I thought, my dear," continued Philip; "flirtation and filial piety form a remarkably judicious combination. Who could object to a young wife's going home to nurse her mother? No one but a monster, of course; and if a young man happens to hover about the place at the same time—even though he *is* a former lover—who can object? Only the monster base enough to suspect unjustly his high-principled spouse. Cowslips—what could be more innocent? Viola," said Philip, coming closer to her, "do you really think that you can carry on a flirtation with this man under my nose without my suspecting it?"

"No, I do not think so for a moment," she replied.

"Then, may I ask, why make the attempt?"

"I did not make the attempt. I came here to nurse my mother, certainly without a thought of Mr. Lancaster's coming here."

"Injured innocence," sneered Philip.

"Not so," said Viola; "I do not call myself innocent!"

"Oh, really—a pretty confession. Then are you allowing this man to make open love to you, and you actually have the audacity to tell this to *me?*"

"I have tried hard to remain true to my old principles, but I do not feel that I have succeeded. I tell you frankly that my sense of duty and allegiance to you is no longer what it was. I have not entirely cast it off—it is too much part of my being for that—but certainly I have ceased to feel as I used to feel about it, so I suppose there must be war between us. You need not trust me; I don't ask to be trusted, for I no longer regard it as a point of honour to follow your wishes in all things, or to make my wifehood the sole pivot of my existence. I feel that it is a false relationship into which I ought never to have entered, and I do not now regard it as binding in the sense that I used to consider it binding, holding sway over my every deed and thought. I repeat, do not trust me now. You must watch over me, frustrate me. I am no longer yours—body and soul. I belong partly to myself at last. Half of my soul, if not the whole, is liberated. Do you understand?"

"Understand that jargon? Certainly not! I only understand that if this sort of thing goes on much longer, there will be nothing for it but to keep you a prisoner with a hired attendant to watch you every hour of the day. You know that I should stick at nothing if necessity prompted. By heaven! I would swear you were mad (I don't think I should have to perjure myself either), and have you kept under lock and key, if it came to that. You evidently don't know me yet. Meet this man again and I promise you that will be your fate. Don't imagine I am using idle threats. That sort of thing doesn't answer with a mule-headed woman like you. I speak without hyperbole. You shall not put my honour and my name in jeopardy, though you die for it. Now go to your mother—I wish to Heaven you had never left her!"

* * * * * * * *

Mrs. Sedley was in great pain during all that night; Viola and the nurse took turns in watching by the bedside. The invalid had been asking anxiously for her sons, and a telegram had been despatched summoning the eldest and Geoffrey, the only ones within reach. The second was with his regiment in India.

The two arrived next morning, and it was strange to see the look on Mrs. Sedley's face when she heard their footsteps. Viola was a well-beloved child, but never had her presence evoked such a light of joy in her mother's face as shone on it

now at the sight of the young scapegrace whose extravagance had helped to bring the family to the brink of ruin, and through whom the sister had been doomed to the most terrible form of sacrifice which a woman of her type can endure.

Viola felt that after all the years of companionship between mother and daughter, this stranger son was more to her mother than she was. She who had watched by the bedside, feeling the anguish of every pang to her heart's core, knew that the last look of love would be turned not on her but on him.

And so it proved.

The exaltation of feeling caused by her son's return caused a rally in the invalid, but before evening the watchers saw that she was weaker, and that the alarming symptoms were increasing.

The doctor was sent for, for the second time that day; and every one waited in suspense for his coming. There was a hush all through the house, which seemed the deeper from the heavy mist that hung about the park, the white, familiar mist which seemed so characteristic of the shut-in, gloomy, unhealthy old house, over which the hand of death was resting. What could be more appropriate than death in that atmosphere of fog and stagnation? Not the faintest stir was in the air; the movement and tumult of life had no place here. It was a spot where the most vigorous, if forbidden to return speedily to the outer world of hope and effort, might feel ready to lie down and die.

The sound of the doctor's phaeton broke through the stillness.

His verdict was decisive; the patient had not many hours to live, and, seeing what she suffered, her family were to be congratulated.

A terrible five hours passed before the end came, hours which seemed to Viola like so many years of cruel experience.

Mr. Sedley, when he was at last made to understand that the end was so near, became almost distraught. He knelt at the bedside sobbing like a child, entreating his wife to stay with him, declaring that he would be lost without her, that he had always adored her, even at his worst, and imploring her to forgive him for his past ill conduct.

"My husband, if I have anything to forgive, I forgive it freely. I would have borne from you whatever you might choose to inflict—was I not your wife?"

"I have been a brute," he groaned.

She laid her thin, long hand on his head, and said a few words in his ear.

"I will try," he said, sobbing; "I will try."

Her voice was growing very weak; the last moments were evidently drawing near.

"Ah! you have ever been a good and dutiful child," she said, as Viola with quivering lips bent down and kissed her.

"God has been very good to me. You will be faithful to your life's end."

At the last, a great peace seemed to fall upon the dying woman; she murmured texts from the Bible, interspersed with words of exhortation to follow Christ, to walk with Him to the end, to seek Him, and lose all for His sake.

"He has given me rest and peace; He has saved my soul with His precious Blood."

A woman of one mood, of one motive, one thought, she died as she had lived, with her eyes fixed on the same Image, the aspect and perspective of all things still unchanged. She spoke in gasps:

"Viola, you will be faithful to the end—My husband, God will forgive—We shall meet again—God be with you, dear ones. To Him I commend you, till our blessed reunion in Christ—Christ, my God, save and forgive!"

A last long kiss, whose memory remained to Viola's dying day, the final pitiful farewells in the fading light of that dreary, fate-laden afternoon, and then all was over.

Viola felt herself being drawn away by a firm, kindly hand, as the dying agony drew to its crisis.

"Do not grieve—I am thankful—so thankful."

The last look was for the son, the last prayer for his salvation.

The long martyrdom was over. As far as earthly prescience could decide, the tired woman was at rest.

The agonising wheel of life had ceased to whirl, and where there had been pain and striving, there was a black unconsciousness. Oh! to pierce for one moment that veil of mystery! To follow the departed soul through those gates of darkness!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DUST TO DUST.

THOSE were ghastly days at the Manor-House which succeeded Mrs. Sedley's death.

The dull fog still clung about the park and shrouded the avenue, and on the second day a solemn rain began to fall, making everything sodden and unspeakably dreary. Mr. Sedley appeared to be stunned by his loss. He had never believed in illness, unless it were a case of scarlet or typhoid fever. That any woman could go about with a mortal disease gnawing at her life, performing her ordinary duties, was an idea quite out of his range, and it seemed almost impossible for him to realise that the old order of things which his

wife had for so long maintained at the Manor-House was over and done with forever.

Mr. Sedley very soon set up a fiction that he had been a devoted husband, and that his loss had utterly broken him.

His bewilderment, discomfort, and the profound disturbance of long-established habits, were all placed to the account of his grief.

Viola never knew how those dreadful days were lived through. She and Geoffrey drew near together during that funereal experience. He was strongly affected by his mother's loss, not so much because he deeply felt it, as because he found himself, for the first time, in the presence of death. He began to confide some of his difficulties to Viola, when they sat alone by the fire in the evenings, perhaps after passing together the door of that closed room where the dead woman lay so calm and peaceful.

"Viola, they say in another fifty years nobody will believe in the immortality of the soul."

They were sitting in the drawing-room towards evening, the curtains not yet drawn. Outside was the same greyness and mist that had hung about the place since Mrs. Sedley's death.

"I hadn't thought much about these things, to tell you the truth; I imagined that I believed in immortality, and God and religion, but now—" He paused, with a look of awe on his face. "What do you think, Viola? I suppose you think we were all taught to think in our childhood."

"O Geoffrey, I don't know," Viola exclaimed, thrusting her hand through her hair and crouching lower over the fire. "I have been so much shaken lately, I begin to feel that our own beliefs will have to be learned and believed all over again if they are to be of any use to us. They don't answer to one's call when one is in dire extremity. They leave you—I believe they leave you more lonely and hopeless than professed unbelievers are left in the presence of their dead. I can't tell you what a sense of despair comes to me when I look at our mother's face, peaceful as it is. I can't help thinking of her life, and the utter ruin of it, and the mistake of it—and nobody understands! When people *will* console me and talk about heaven and all that, I feel as if I would rather they told me brutally that there is no hope; that there is no ground for our faiths, no pity for our love, no answer to our yearnings,—anything would be better than this silly, hollow consolation that they offer you."

Geoffrey looked amazed. "I had no idea——"

"No, of course you hadn't," she interposed hastily. "I am frightened of it myself, and yet I feel as if there were some faith more real than the faith of our childhood,—only I can't find it."

The conversation was an epoch in Geoffrey's life, and the strengthening of a new impetus in Viola's. It was also the

beginning of a friendship on fresh foundations between brother and sister, which entirely altered the direction of development of Geoffrey's character.

The day of the funeral was cold and damp. Brother and sister, standing together at the window of the old schoolroom, watched the gloomy procession draw up to the door, the silent decorous bustle of black-coated mutes, and then the lifting of the coffin into the hearse.

Some feeling which Viola could not have explained induced her to witness every ghastly detail.

Among the rows of mist-shrouded trees, the black procession moved solemnly to the park gates. Alighting from the coach at the churchyard, Viola was carried back in memory to her wedding-day when she had passed between rows of villagers and over garlands of fresh flowers to the clanging of the noisy bells.

In another few minutes they were all in their places, Mr. Sedley and his two sons, Philip and Viola, side by side in the chancel.

Every family in the neighbourhood, and all the Upton people, were represented, and among the congregation were the Manor-House coachmen, Thomas the gardener, and "old Willum," a little more bent, but otherwise just the same as of yore. At the sight of him, for the first time, Viola had to force back threatening tears.

But the trial was yet to come.

The first part of the ceremony over, the procession moved out to the grey churchyard, and wended its way through the tombstones to the open grave. Viola's heart gave a sick throb.

Cold, gloomy, gruesome! There was not a gleam of hope, not a ray of sunshine or of triumph in the whole depressing scene! It seemed as if, in life and in death, Mrs. Sedley were alike incapable of evoking such a passionate note. Her Christian's faith and her Christian's trust were equally destitute of inspiring force. "Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust—" Never in her life had Viola doubted so profoundly, never had she plunged into such an abyss of despair, of religion, of God, as when she stood by her mother's grave and watched the coffin with its white wreaths being lowered into the earth. How greedy it seemed; yearning to close up over its prey! The by-standers were flinging flowers onto the coffin: primroses and violets, and the first-fruits of the garden. As through the mists of a dream, Viola saw familiar faces round the grave: Mrs. Evans was there, and Dick, and Sir Philip and Lady Dendraith, and Thomas and "old Willum" and Mr. Pellett (how kind of him to come!), and there was Caleb looking solemn and argumentative in the background. At first sight of his face, Viola was seized with a mad impulse to laugh. As her eyes turned away from the countenance of the philoso-

pher they lighted unexpectedly upon another and only too familiar face!

She had been told by Mrs. Evans that Harry Lancaster was not to be at the funeral, but Mrs. Evans must have been misinformed, for there he stood, half hidden by Sir Philip's stalwart form, and partially eclipsed, at intervals, by Mrs. Pellett's new funeral bonnet. Viola gave a visible start, and at the same instant, as if in grim comment on the nature of all human affection, the first clod of earth fell with a dull thud upon the coffin.

The sweet flowers lay crushed and stained beneath it.

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Viola's eyes contracted with a look of terror.

"In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life——"

She looked up piteously, as if she were asking whether that hope were trustworthy or utterly hollow, as it seemed to her to-day in this grey churchyard, amidst the black-gloved respectability that hung its head decorously round the grave.

"Sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."

"Eternal life!" Harry was not more hope-inspired than Viola at that moment.

For that dim defrauded unresponsive spirit, what would life eternal have to offer? Growth, discovery, creation? a tapestried experience making richer the possibilities of all human existence? Not this, but only a stagnant gazing at the same monotonous group of images, a repetition *ad infinitum* of the same dull idea! That surely was not *life*.

With all her sanctity, with all her religious enthusiasm, the dead woman had no breadth of spiritual outlook; it was to little local things that her mind held relation; to changing temporal institutions that she clung, flinging over them the threadbare mantle of religion. A life entirely composed of spiritual experience, an eternal life in which no small observances, or earthly things had part was inconceivable for such a nature.

Less reasoned but none the less profound was Viola's doubt of the promises of the burial service. Oh! for a moment of unquestioning belief—anything to still the horrible fear that possessed her as she peered down into the black abyss of Death, and felt the spirit departing from her for ever.

Harry divined that she was passing through a great mental crisis.

What might the new wave of emotion sweep away in its course? These thoughts of death had touched her closely indeed. What if some day she had to stand beside *another* grave and hear that dull thud upon the coffin-lid as the greedy earth closed round it? What would she feel then if she had allowed the beloved and loving soul to go from her, perhaps for ever, into the great darkness, still thinking that his love was but half returned, still grieving and sore at heart because

of her? Would any one of the motives for which she had done this thing seem worth a thought at such a moment? Ah! no; desperate and heart-stricken, she would feel only that she had been false to the one divine thing in life, and that her sorrow and hopeless remorse had come too late!

In the presence of Death she was conscious of the unutterable pathos of all affection, the tragedy that comes sooner or later in the train of every intense human emotion.

Harry, watching her as she stood with her eyes fixed upon the grave, felt a growing conviction that the battle with Fate which he and Sibella were waging for the possession of this woman's soul, had entered upon a new phase.

She looked up, and their eyes met.

He drew a long breath. Viola was awake at last; loving to her utmost, hating to her utmost; reckless and well-nigh desperate. She was ready now for anything.

They were on their way to the crucial moment. Had she sufficient force to hold on to the end? Once resolved, would she fling behind her all weak remorse, free herself from the clinging remnants of abandoned motives? Would she eschew fatal hesitations and prove herself to be made of the stuff which produces great deeds of heroism or of crime? would she act boldly and consistently as she had resolved, or would she show herself the child of her circumstances, stumbling fatally under the burden of her sad woman's heritage of indecision, fear, vain remorse, untimely scruples? No marvel if she did so, but woe to her and to all concerned if she failed at the critical moment! A short time now would decide everything!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN GRIM EARNEST.

YES, she was ready for anything!

She moved as one in a dream; the people around her seemed like shadows. She spoke, and smiled, and played her part among them; but even as she spoke that grey churchyard, with its open grave, was before her mind's eye; she heard the thud of earth upon the coffin-lid; while the clammy mist seemed to be clinging round her, and the words went out mournfully over the tombs, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Sad, hopeless, terrible, seemed the game of life; the thought of it created a recklessness that Viola had never known before. Scruples, hesitations, seemed ridiculous in the gaunt presence of Death, who mocks at human effort, and cuts short the base and the noble at their work with grim impartiality. Yet as soon as she left the Manor-House to return to her cliff-

side home the daring spirit suddenly departed from her, as if by magic. On the instant that she crossed the threshold she felt the strange, gloomy, will-destroying influence of the place descend upon her, pall-like.

Philip's dominant spirit seemed to pervade the whole house, even in his absence.

Though he was often away from home he used to appear at uncertain hours during the day, and Viola never knew when she was likely to be alone.

Her husband seemed to take a delight in haunting her, and in turning up when and where she least expected him.

He used to come in stealthily and appear at her elbow before she knew of his approach. This custom had the effect of making her intensely, miserably nervous.

After that experience in the west wing she had been very easily startled, and now she lived in a perpetual state of strain and dread, and had contracted a habit of perpetually looking up in expectation of her husband's panther-like approach.

Her power of resistance and initiative seemed to be charmed out of her by the mere atmosphere of the place; it was almost as if Philip possessed some mysterious magnetic power, so overwhelming was the influence which he asserted over all within his reach, especially over those of nervous temperament. In spite of the associations of the room in the west wing, Viola was still attracted to it; and she felt, moreover, that she could not rest until she had found, and put back in its place, the precious knife which she had let fall in her terror. But she dreaded that Philip might surprise her there again, and for that reason put off day after day her intended visit to that haunt of shadows.

When she had almost given up hope of finding an opportunity, Philip announced that he was going out for the whole afternoon, and Viola at once resolved to choose that day for her quest. It would not take more than a few minutes to replace the weapon in the oak cabinet; if she went immediately after her husband left the house, surely even he could not discover her.

She watched him out of sight, and then looking nervously round, she crossed the dark hall, avoiding the smiling eyes of the portraits, and passed through the locked door leading to the west wing. The stillness of so many empty rooms was oppressive. Stepping as quietly as she could, Viola passed the closed doors until she came to the Death-chamber, whose lock she turned with beating heart. After a moment's pause she entered.

There was the great black bedstead, sombre and solemn; there stood the oak cabinet with its carved door half open, just as it had been left on that dreadful afternoon.

Viola sickened with reasonless terror.

She felt as if she must turn and leave her errand unaccom-

plished. But she resisted the impulse, and went forward with her eyes fixed on the floor, seeking the fallen knife.

Is there some Fate that guides the footsteps of men, and maps out their path for them from birth to death?

Viola had always been convinced that she was thus guided; she had given up all expectation of rescue, and looked into the eyes of Destiny mournfully and hopelessly.

Every movement, every act, every thought, was foreordained to lead up to misfortune.

She stooped suddenly and picked up the knife from the floor, where it lay just as she had dropped it. She was thankful to hold it again in her hands, to know that it was safe.

When last she held it thus, she was battling fiercely against herself—against the supreme passion of her life; and now—now the faith had been lost, conscience defeated, hope abandoned. She laid the little dagger passionately to her lips, looking round with her quick nervous glance, as if dreading every moment to see the form of her husband looming through the dusk.

She laid the weapon carefully in its hiding-place beside the other treasures, locked the cabinet, and with a sigh of relief turned away.

A qualm of fear passed through her as she approached the bed, but this time no figure emerged from its shadows. She reached the door safely, went out, and locked it.

Thank Heaven the ordeal was over! On turning, her heart gave a great bound, for she found herself standing face to face with Mrs. Barber! She uttered a little cry of dismay, and put out her hand to steady herself against the lintel of the door.

"Mrs. Barber," she said at last, "what are you doing up here?"

Mrs. Barber set her lips.

"I am here, ma'am," she replied with dignity, "in the performance of my duty. I came to see that the rooms are kept in order."

"Oh!" said Viola.

"Your tea is waiting for you," added Mrs. Barber, who felt that she had the best of the situation; "it was taken in half an hour ago."

"I will go and have it," said Viola hurriedly.

She hastened down the echoing corridor, crossed the hall, and shut herself into the little ante-room, where, as Mrs. Barber had reproachfully announced, the tea was standing untouched. But the tea had yet longer to wait.

Viola went down on her knees on the hearth-rug, absently taking the poker and goading the already willing little fire into a brighter blaze.

Maria, who was basking in the warmth, set up a loud purring, and rubbed herself against the arm of her mistress.

Viola knew now for certain what she had often before vaguely suspected: that in Philip's absence she was watched by the housekeeper!

Again and again she had found reason to fear it, and to-day's instance confirmed the suspicion. There remained not the shadow of doubt in her mind that Mrs. Barber had followed her this afternoon to the West Wing; that in fact Mrs. Barber was her gaoler. Whom would Philip employ next? Possibly the kitchen-maid!

The walls of her prison seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. Viola was reminded of the gruesome old story of the prisoner shut up in a tower whose walls encroached a foot each day, till at last they closed in and crushed him to death.

When would the catastrophe arrive? She would rather it came at once than keep her thus perpetually on the rack of expectation and dread.

She gave a nervous shudder and looked round the room suspiciously, as if fearing that she was not alone even now.

How did she know that she was free from espionage? The whole household might be spies for aught that she knew! There was no escaping Philip's vigilance. It seemed as if her most secret thoughts were at his mercy.

Feeling nervous and overwrought, Viola was just moving into a low chair before the fire, when a faint sound caught her ear.

She started and looked round, expecting to see her husband, but there was no one in the room. The sound came again: a faint tapping on the window-pane.

Viola's heart began to beat. She listened anxiously. In another second again came the stealthy tap upon the glass.

It was raining, and there was a slight beating of rain-drops on the panes, which Viola tried to think might have been mistaken for the other sound; but when this was repeated a third time, she rose, summoning all her courage, and went towards the window. There, out in the dusk, she saw a man's face looking in.

She clutched the nearest chair, turning very white. The man signed to her to open the window. She hesitated for a moment, and then with a sort of blind courage she went up close to it and peered out.

"Who is it?"

"Don't be afraid: it is Caleb Foster. Open the window."

In an instant the roar of the sea smote loudly on the ear, and the soft west wind, and rain were blowing into the fire-lit room.

"What is it? Will you come in, or—?" She hesitated, looking back nervously over her shoulder.

"Come out to me," said Caleb. "I won't detain you a moment. Oh! it is raining; you will get wet."

"No matter, no matter." She snatched up a rug from the sofa and stepped out on to the gusty terrace.

The waves were dragging the stones savagely back and forward just below.

"I was directed to give you this," said Caleb calmly, bringing a letter from his pocket, where it had evidently not gained in cleanliness or smoothness, "and I was told to bid you be of good cheer, and brave and determined, for you have faithful friends."

"Are you in their confidence?" asked Viola, flushing.

"I know nothing," said Caleb; "private affairs are not my business. I am called to deliver a note and a ridiculous message, and I deliver them. If other people take pleasure in emotional excesses, I regret it; but on the principle that the individual is at liberty to do what he pleases, on condition that he does not encroach upon the liberty of others, I offer no obstruction to the errors of our friends. They employ me as a messenger—I am willing to oblige; I ask no questions. Should you consult me, I might be ready to give my opinion; otherwise I abstain from interference. Good-evening. The sooner I am off the better. One word of unasked advice, however: don't act on impulse; think everything out calmly from all sides; count the cost before you take any decided step, and don't fly in the face of the world if you can avoid it. Socrates——" But Caleb thought better of it, and retired without mentioning what Socrates had to say on this point. Viola hastened into the house to read her letter. It was from Harry, asking her to meet him at a spot on the downs about a quarter of a mile from the coast-guard station, on the following afternoon at four o'clock. Sibella was expecting a visit from Philip at that time, so there would be no difficulty. Harry would be at the appointed spot in any case; if Viola did not come, he would understand that something had happened to prevent her or that she refused to accede to his request. Viola pressed her hands to her brow distractedly. The time for decision had indeed come!

Every fear, prejudice, faith, principle, superstition which she had ever known seemed to rush back upon her in a mighty flood, forbidding a response to the appeal of this letter. The secrecy was revolting to her instincts; the deceit and underhand plotting seemed intolerable.

She realised that she had nevertheless to choose between that and life-long endurance of her present circumstances. These left her no alternative. She was startled out of her cogitations by the sound of a soft footstep in the corridor.

She flung the letter into the fire, and stood awaiting her husband's approach. He had returned very soon. Maria got up and slunk away.

"Well, my dear," he said with his wonted smile. "What have you been doing this afternoon? You are flushed."

She put her hands to her cheeks.

"I see too that you have not taken your tea." He looked at her keenly. She felt that he would read every secret in her eyes.

"I am not a great tea-drinker," she said.

"Still, you do generally take it. Have you had visitors?"

"No one has been in the house."

"Oh! have you met someone *out* of the house?"

"I saw Caleb," she answered, struggling against the benumbing sensation of powerlessness which Philip's presence always created in her.

"You and Caleb seem to have a great deal in common," he remarked. "Were you out, then, in all this rain?"

"Yes, for a short time."

"Talking to Caleb?"

"Yes."

"Would it seem impertinent if I were to enquire the subject of your colloquy?"

She hesitated.

"I think you may just as well tell me," said Philip. "I shall find out if I wish to know."

"Are you going to cross-question Caleb?"

"That is a matter of detail," said Philip. "I only remark that if I wish to know I *shall* know. How have you been spending the rest of the afternoon?"

"I am tired of answering questions," she said with a sudden flash of rebellion.

"Oh! something up, evidently, this afternoon. That, too, I shall find out. Your affairs seem to be getting into a very complicated condition, my dear; I can't say I think you have the head to carry through an elaborate system of plots. It seems also a little inconsistent with your upbringing and your 'principles.' I suppose, however, it is the natural weapon of the weaker vessel. Women take to it by instinct."

"By necessity, you might say."

"From preference, my dear. I know your adorable sex."

Philip established himself in the easy chair and stretched himself leisurely.

"An unusually good fire," he said, leaning back and crossing his legs. "You have been burning something, I see."

Viola looked round with a start, and Philip smiled.

"There is a little bit of charred paper sticking to the side of the grate."

He took the poker and turned it down, and as the heat caught it, one could see the lines of handwriting in little glowing spots across the note-paper.

"Put two and two together—H'm! Did Caleb bring a note?"

"I have already explained that I would rather not answer any more questions," said Viola. "If you are so certain of finding out all that you wish to know, why catechise me?

Find out what you please; I don't think I should care very much what you did."

She was thinking of a grey churchyard and an open grave and the thought of it brought a delicious sense of rest. If the worst came to the worst——

"My dear," said Philip, "excuse my saying so, but you are losing your looks."

She raised her eyebrows slightly, but did not answer. "All this plotting keeps you anxious—it is not becoming."

She smiled. She was not sorry to be less pleasing in his sight.

"You do not seem to take much interest in your dress either," he went on. "Now there is no greater folly a wife can be guilty of than to neglect her appearance. Her husband is apt to follow after strange gods."

"The stranger the better," Viola muttered between her teeth.

"You may treat all these matters with disdain, my dear, but I can assure you your conduct is most foolish. A man expects his wife to make some effort to attract him."

Viola was silent.

"To be frank, my dear, you have in every way turned out unsatisfactory; as an investment (so to put it) I may say that you are, in point of fact, more or less of a fraud—pardon my crudeness. I bargained for a wife who would behave as other wives behave, and also I naturally expected that she would do what you have hitherto failed to do—provide the family with an heir."

"A duty and a privilege indeed!" Viola observed.

"Why you sneer I know not," said Philip. "I could have had women by the dozen who would have been only too delighted to fill your position, at any price. Perhaps you will understand that I feel a little 'sold' under the circumstances."

"I understand only too well everything that has to do with our fatal marriage. Why won't you let me go?"

"And have a scandal attached to my name! No, thank you, that won't suit me at all. It will suit me better to bring you to reason. I have tried fair means, and they have failed; now I shall try foul. I am tired of all these childish conspiracies with your former lover and his *chère amie*, who, you may not be aware, is carrying on a flirtation with that gay Lothario at the same time that she makes love to *me*."

"To *you!*"

"Yes, my innocent one, to me."

Viola looked at him coldly. "You are very clever," she said, "but there are some women whom you could not understand if you studied them for a thousand years. Mrs. Lincoln is one of them."

"Then you understand this Sibylline creature?"

"No; but I am not so hopelessly at fault as you are, for at least I am aware that I do not understand her."

"Well, if a man of the world doesn't know when a woman wants to flirt with him. he ought to be ashamed of himself."

Viola could only look at her husband in bewilderment. Why was he telling her this? Did he really believe what he said, or was it to arouse in her mind distrust of Sibella? Surely Philip could not be attempting to excite her jealousy!

He was too clever for that, yet what could be his motive for such assertions? If Sibella had given any reason for them, it was certainly for some object connected with Viola's own fate. Sibella in love with Philip was unthinkable. Harry's letter said that Philip was expected to call at Fir Dell to-morrow afternoon. What did this mean? Viola was puzzling over these complications, when Philip broke the silence once more.

"Now, my dear, I should like you to understand things a little. I have stood a great deal of nonsense from you, knowing how absurdly you were brought up, and how ignorant you were of the ways of the world. But it is really time that you knew a little more. Perhaps you are not aware that before our marriage my father advanced a large sum of money to your father to enable him to pay his debts and to stay on at the Manor-House, which otherwise he would have had to leave. Liberal settlements were made on you, and, in fact, your father—knowing my infatuation—availed himself of the opportunity to make a good haul. I, of course, thought so charming a bride ample indemnification. I believe that your father did pay some of his debts, and he continued to live at the Manor-House, but he also began to contract fresh debts, on the strength of his alliance with our family, and it is morally certain that we shall never see a penny of that money again. You will pardon my remarking that, all things considered, your father got decidedly the better of us."

"It would be more reasonable to complain of these matters to him, then," said Viola. "I, having been, not the seller, but the thing sold, can scarcely be called to account for its owner's delinquencies. If you allowed yourself to be imposed upon, you have no one but yourself to blame. Such accidents will happen even to the cleverest of purchasers."

"Still, I think that the matter concerns you more closely than you are disposed to allow," said Philip. "If a man buys a pointer who will not point, he has either to send him back to where he came from, or to train him into better ways—with the help of the whip if necessary."

Viola's eyes flashed.

"You can go too far with me," she said.

"Possibly; but up to now it seems I have not gone far enough."

"I don't see what remains for you to do as regards insult and insolence."

"Oh! I assure you we are only beginning. I have been

playing hitherto, and playing very badly. In future it shall be in grim earnest. I shall exact what is due to the uttermost farthing."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PERILOUS PROJECT.

ADRIENNE LANCASTER disturbed husband and wife at their *tête-à-tête.*

She was in great anxiety, for she had just learned that her mother stood in imminent danger of losing the little pittance on which they had hitherto been struggling to live and to keep up appearances. What was to become of them if the blow did fall, Adrienne dared scarcely conjecture. Her mother had been urging her to accept Bob Hunter's proposal, resorting to tears, commands, reproaches, and finally to "wrestlings in prayer" even in her daughter's presence. Adrienne was looking alarmingly ill and worried.

"Everything seems to come at once," she said; "not only have I all these burdens to bear, but Harry also is a great anxiety." She explained that her brother had been going perpetually to Mrs. Lincoln's, who of course had a very evil influence upon him: and what appeared so alarming was that he seemed perfectly infatuated and would hear no word against her.

"At this very moment," said Adrienne, despairingly, "he is sitting in her library at Fir Dell, listening to one knows not what wickedness and folly."

Had Adrienne been present at Fir Dell, she would have been astonished indeed. It was worse even than she thought.

"I wish to Heaven we could do this without so much plotting and concealment," Harry was saying. "Viola hates it, and I fear at any moment she may do something desperate which will upset all our plans.

"The sooner we make our attempt, the better," said Sibella; "but for my part I have no scruple about using the only weapons left us by the enemy. A prisoner has to employ what means he can get, if he wants to escape. If he takes his gaoler honestly into his confidence, his chances of regaining his freedom are, to say the least of it, inconsiderable. Picture to yourself a man bound hand and foot, and at the same time cunningly persuaded by those who have bound him that he must make no deceitful or underhand attempt to liberate himself. That man is an idiot if he listens to such teaching; he must try anything that offers itself—subterfuge, stratagem, what you will—in order to overcome the brute-force

which has been used against him. I wish you could persuade Viola of this."

"I can never persuade her," Sibella answered. "The grim necessities of her position may force her to use distasteful tools, but she will never lose her scruples. She will never see that these hesitations, this half-heartedness, in the struggle for freedom tend as much as the direct force of the enemy to make it unattainable. But this is the work of centuries; it is in the blood; arguments are unavailing. We must trust to the force of the personal impetus in Viola's case. She will never change her feeling rapidly enough through the suasion of ideas. What are ideas, in the face of prejudices? Stars at midday!"

"Do you think she will keep the appointment to-morrow afternoon?" asked Harry.

"I would not count too surely upon it. Her notions are at present elastic. She may at any moment have a relapse and determine to do her duty, as she calls it, to the end. If you have any news to tell me, come to the beach below my house to-morrow morning. Come in any case, as I may have something to say to you. Try and keep your sister away from Viola if you can. She is a dangerous foe to us. We could scarcely have one more formidable."

Harry shook his head gloomily.

Everything seemed going wrong. The pending family misfortune was not only most unlucky in itself, but it happened at a most unlucky time. Adrienne seemed at her wits' end to know what to do. She said she would try and find employment in teaching if the worst came to the worst.

If it did come to the worst, Harry felt that he could not desert them: and then, what was to become of Viola?

It was nevertheless decided between him and Sibella that plans for the flight should be made on the following afternoon, as if nothing had occurred. They could be altered if necessary, but might as well be arranged. Sibella was to be informed at once if Viola agreed. Viola and Harry were to leave the country as quickly as possible, making up their minds to face all possibilities, beginning life over again, and taking their fate in their own hands."

"Don't forget at any time that you did decide to take the risk," said Sibella. "Viola risks more than you do; and whatever troubles you may have to weather, they must inevitably fall harder upon her. She gives up everything for your sake. Always remember that, for the time for feeling what you have sacrificed begins. I need scarcely tell you this; but even the best of men are sometimes forgetful."

"I hope I shall not be forgetful in this matter," said Harry, gravely; "though I am not among the best of men."

Sibella undertook to do all she could to detain Philip next day as long as possible, though she felt it difficut to count upon his movements with certainty. She harboured a suspi-

cion that he had guessed their whole plan, and was quietly watching them, ready at the right moment to frustrate it. There was something about his expression and manner that was not reassuring. He never breathed a word hinting at suspicion, but Sibella feared that he did suspect; though how nearly his guesses fitted the facts, she could not tell. On that day when they had met on the beach, a challenge had been tacitly given and accepted between them. Philip Dendraith was not the man to forget that challenge, and he knew that Sibella's memory was at least as long as his.

They were thus in a state of secret war; meeting always with compliments and smiles, fencing with one another with amazing skill.

"We never tire," Sibella used to say cheerfully. "He is resolved and I am resolved. I am not like Viola. I fight such an adversary with the first best weapon. I will oppose force with fraud till justice has delivered us. What do I care? Injury and insult to a suffering sister shall not be allowed to succeed for want of a little frank transgression. I will fool him to the top of his bent if I can, as he would fool me. What man can stand flattery? I flatter him. Sometimes I think I have made way, but possibly his submission is only a ruse to deceive me; one can never tell. Still, the man is vain; the heel of Achilles! He is used to the homage of women: that gives me a handle. If he thought I was falling a victim to his fascinations, I believe even *his* astuteness would fail him. Well, we shall see. Everything hangs on the next few days, and much on to-morrow's interview being safely achieved and the arrangements well made. Give Viola written directions in case of mistakes, and make sure she understands them thoroughly. And don't be so excited at seeing her again, that you forget all prudence. Philip may have discovered Caleb's visit, for aught we know. You can't be too careful. Play your part bravely and cautiously. Everything depends on trifles in such matters. I shall be anxiously thinking of you, while I and my visitor will entertain one another with our usual flow of badinage and compliment. There are few things I would not do in order to defeat this man." Sibella clasped her hands, and her eyes sparkled. "A fierce struggle lies before us now. See if (as Pope says) "you don't find me equivocating pretty genteelly!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WHIRLPOOL OF FATE.

THE force of circumstances prevailed.

Mrs. Dixie, overpowered by anxiety and vexation, became sufficiently ill to work upon her daughter's fears; and when next morning the dreaded blow fell, Adrienne was not only crushed by the misfortune, but thoroughly alarmed at her mother's condition.

The old lady was now perpetually alluding to the workhouse as the final destination of the Lancaster family, and she gave Adrienne to understand that this declension of their fortunes was entirely due to her undutiful obstinacy about Bob Hunter.

Mrs. Dixie even descended to particulars regarding their future existence in that last refuge for the destitute.

Adrienne, knowing that in truth they were quite penniless, and that her mother's life depended upon careful nursing, was almost in despair. At this crisis Fate decreed that Bob Hunter should appear again at the cottage to repeat his periodic proposal. Adrienne, tired out with trouble and perplexity, ended by accepting it. As Harry said bitterly, it was a foregone conclusion.

From that moment Mrs. Dixie began to recover, and Bob Hunter pirouetted in triumph.

It was far from being the happiest time of Adrienne's life. She thought of Sibella, and wondered what she would say when she heard of the engagement.

"But what is that woman to me?" she angrily asked herself.

On that same eventful morning Adrienne went over to Upton Castle to announce the news. She was anxious not to allow it to reach her friend through village gossip.

Viola's congratulations were not effusive.

"Adrienne," she exclaimed, on first realizing the nature of the announcement, "oh! how could you be so mad?"

Adrienne had not at this time mentioned the misfortune that had befallen them. She coloured painfully.

"Bob is a good fellow at heart, and I do think it is all for the best, and I mean to do my utmost to make him happy. And then,—well, you know, there is my mother ill, and requiring all sorts of things we can't give her, and she feels so terribly our position. You know it is as we feared. We got a letter from the lawyer this morning; well, in short, things could not be worse."

"O Adrienne! I am grieved; what a curse the want of

money seems to be! And you have to sacrifice yourself because of this."

"Am I to watch my mother dying, and know that there is nothing before us in the future but genteel starvation?—indeed, I don't see how it can be even genteel?"

"I think," said Viola, growing very white, "that it is better to be in your grave than alive and—a woman."

Adrienne looked shocked.

"Oh no, dear Viola; a woman always has a noble and a happy sphere in her home, wherever it may be; we must not take despairing views of life, even in the darkest hours."

"This ought not to be," cried Viola. "Can't your brother help you? can't you work? can't you——"

"And my mother ill, our home broken up, and not a penny to call our own? After all, I am going to do my duty to Bob, and I always think it is a woman's fault if her home isn't happy."

Adrienne did not meet with much more encouragement when she told her brother of her engagement.

"I believe it to be my duty," she said apologetically.

"Oh, in that case——" he shrugged his shoulders. "I have sometimes wondered how these things come about; now I see: the process seems very simple." Presently he laid his hand on her shoulder, softening. "So the burden is laid upon you," he said, with a sigh; "why can't I bear it instead?"

She shook her head.

"That is impossible, as you know. Don't grieve, dear Harry; I am not unhappy. I feel that I am doing right, and that I shall have strength to perform my task."

Harry thought that his sister had had enough tasks to perform already. What she needed was the radiance of a great joy to warm and expand her whole being. Always in the shade, she was becoming pale and poor, like a flower grown in a cellar. In course of time she would perhaps become a second Mrs. Evans, busily adding to the depression of an already low-spirited world.

"I am satisfied that it is my duty," said Adrienne.

"Oh, confound this everlasting 'duty'!" Harry exclaimed irritably. Adrienne did not at once reply. She had noticed that her brother had become quick-tempered, not to say morose, of late, and she wondered if Mrs. Lincoln had anything to do with this change for the worse.

"You may say 'confound duty!' dear Harry," said Adrienne; "but you know that you feel its sacred call in your heart, and dare not disobey it any more than I dare to do so."

"Oh! don't I?" cried Harry, who in his present mood regarded "duty" with unmitigated acrimony and ill-will. "I would dare to do anything. No good comes of prudence, or duty either, that I can see."

Adrienne was much concerned at her brother's frame of

mind, and again put it down to the evil influence of Mrs. Lincoln.

"I wish I could get you to look upon my engagement in a different light, dear Harry," she pleaded.

"Pray mention the light," said Harry affably, "and I will see it in that at once."

She shook her head.

"Don't you recognise that Duty——"

"Look here, if you mention that word again," he said, "I shall emigrate."

"No, no," interposed Adrienne hastily. "You must see that for a woman——"

"Timbuctoo or the Wild West," Harry murmured threateningly.

"A woman's lot in life is different from a man's," Adrienne persisted.

"Very," said Harry; "she can't go off at a moment's notice to Timbuctoo."

"Upon her shoulders are laid the beautiful and sacred cares of married life," pursued Adrienne. "I believe that upon these rest the very foundations of society."

"Once upon a time," said Harry grimly, "it was the custom to build a living creature into the walls of every city, for otherwise it was thought the city would not stand. This premature interment, with such unpleasantness as might ensue to the chosen victims, was intended to make firm and solid the foundations of society. Perhaps it did. The foundations, at any rate, seem to be exceedingly solid and firm. When is the marriage to be?"

"As soon as possible. Bob wants it at once, and mother too. We should not go away for more than a few days, and mother would come to us almost immediately. We thought the wedding might be in ten days. Of course you will give me away."

"I should have thought a grown-up woman might be considered able to give herself away; but if you wish it—in ten days," he repeated, thoughtfully, to himself. After that he fell into a reverie, from which nothing could permanently rouse him. Even when Adrienne recurred to the topic of "duty," he let it pass unchallenged.

That this mildness was the result of preoccupation was proved a little later in the day, when he and Adrienne strolled together to the beach, Harry flinging himself at full length against the pebble ridge below Fir Dell and throwing stones into the water. Deceived by his previous calmness, Adrienne had been trying to show him how mistaken he was in his views of life, and especially in his interpretation of the natural destiny of woman.

"Her most sacred duty dear Harry——"

"*Damn——!*"

The monosyllable was breathed *sotto voce*, but with sup-

pressed ferocity, into the shingles. The culprit then hastily pulled his hat over his eyes, and rolled over several times till he was out of earshot.

Adrienne had not caught the smothered "language of imprecation," but she was none the less alarmed at her brother's eccentric behaviour. He continued to lie at full length on the stones with his cap pulled over his eyes in a manner that seemed to Adrienne to denote a shocking state of self-abandonment. What had come to him? She looked up to the distant castle for inspiration, but the long rows of high windows only reminded her of another strange and perturbed spirit imprisoned therein.

Suddenly Harry sat bolt upright, his cap still very much awry and his hair extravagantly ruffled. Adrienne followed the direction in which he was gazing.

A figure was seen descending the pathway through the pine woods from Fir Dell.

Harry shaded his eyes, and strained them anxiously.

"Who is it?"

"Mrs. Lincoln."

"Oh, let me go!" exclaimed Adrienne, hastily jumping up.

Harry gave a grim smile. It amused him that his sister shrank from meeting a woman who had dared the enmity of the world rather than remain in the position which Adrienne was about to accept deliberately, with her eyes open.

"You had better come and speak to her," said Harry. "She will enlarge your mind."

"I will never willingly enter that woman's presence again," Adrienne cried. "Good-bye, I am going home; won't you come too? Do come."

"I want to see Mrs. Lincoln," Harry answered.

Adrienne sorrowfully left him, and when she was alone, she gave way to a fit of quiet lady-like weeping in a neat methodical manner, drying her eyes and putting aside her handkerchief in good time before reaching the village.

Meanwhile Harry and Sibella had met and were moving together closer to the sea.

"It is as we feared," said Harry. "The blow has fallen: my mother and sister are penniless."

Sibella drew a long deep breath. After a pause she said:

"And your sister is engaged to be married to Bob Hunter; you need not tell me. I am grieved. Fortunately your sister has an obedient soul. The marriage-service, strange to say, will reassure her. For her own sake this is devoutly to be wished. But how does all this bear on your own affairs? Must you wait till after the wedding?"

Harry explained that it was to take place in ten days, and that he must of course be present. He felt that he ought also to stay with his mother for the few days till the couple returned to their home. After that Mrs. Dixie would go to

them. Bob happily had accepted his mother-in-law with a light heart.

It was accordingly arranged that Harry should go to town as soon as the bride and bridegroom came to their home; that he should return next day, not to Upton, but to a little place further along the coast called Shepherd's Nook. Thence he could easily walk along the shore to the castle, reaching it after dark, at the time appointed. Sibella was to obtain from Caleb the loan of his boat, the very boat in which Viola and Harry had made that other less momentous journey before her marriage, and in that they were to put off under cover of the darkness, and evade pursuit if any should be offered.

They would land and take the train to Southampton, and thence get over to France if possible on the same night.

The details of this project were further discussed, and all things arranged subject to Viola's consent, even to the day and hour.

"This unexpected delay worries me," said Harry; "it seems ill-omened."

"It is not very long," Sibella answered cheerinly. "Time will soon pass,—sixteen days: why, it is nothing."

"One does not know what may happen in sixteen days."

The twilight was creeping around them, the waves beating monotonously on the patient shore. A belated gull flashed overhead, uttering its shrill cry.

There was an expression of feverish anxiety in Harry's face, as he raised his eyes towards the dim outlines of the Castle, which the darkness was gradually obliterating.

"Caleb said this morning that though it may be good to resist evil laws and conventions for the sake of others, the rebel himself inevitably gets trampled on, and generally by those whom he is trying to rescue. Are we preparing martyrdom for Viola?"

"Remember what she suffers now," said Sibella.

"If I but knew what these slow endless days would bring about!"

"If we knew all that was coming in our life, how many of us would consent to live it out? You will see her this afternoon, remember."

"If she is not there——"

"I think she will be there," said Sibella.

* * * * * * * *

The big stable-yard clock struck four. The appointment was at half-past four.

Philip sat in the library writing letters; he had said nothing about his intention of calling at Fir Dell, and looked as if he had settled down for the afternoon. Viola, like an uneasy spirit, wandered from room to room, and from window to window; unable to keep still for a moment. It was a grey afternoon, and the mist was streaming inland from the sea.

Maria, purring before the ante-room fire, bade placid defiance to the gloom, and looked the emblem of contentment.

"O Maria, why can't I take things as you do, you sensible animal?" Maria blinked. "He has hurt us both, but you purr before the fire and make the best of things, while I let the thought of it eat into me and drive me mad. Foolish, isn't it, dear? You are a model of what a reputable cat—or wife—should be, and the more there are who follow in your footsteps, the fewer the broken hearts. Wise Maria!"

Viola was down before the hearth with her arm round the sleepy animal, who purred a soft acknowledgment of the attention. But a sudden step on the carpet made the cat dart deftly away to hide behind the sofa, wide awake now, and wary.

"I am going out for a short time this afternoon," said Philip. "I hope you won't feel lonely in my absence." This was said with an abundant display of white teeth.

"No, thank you; not at all."

"You had better fill up the tedious interval till my return with a round of calls."

"I don't think I have any calls to pay."

"Excuse me: Mrs. Russel Courtenay reproaches you every time we meet for not having been to see her; and I am sure there is a long-standing debt to Mrs. Pellett. I will order the carriage for you."

"Oh no, please don't," said Viola. "I can get on another day or two without seeing Mrs. Courtenay or Mrs. Pellett."

"If you don't care to do it for your own sake, you might remember that your neglect of social duties is a great handicap to me."

"Some other day I will call," she said.

"Well, I warn you not to be up to any mischief; you will regret it if you do." And with that he left her. Did he know?

Viola hastened upstairs for her hat, and on the threshold of her room she encountered Mrs. Barber.

"What do you want?" Viola asked sharply.

"Excuse me, Ma'am; only to know if Maria was with you."

"Yes, of course she was with me: you know she always is at this time. Be kind enough not to intrude on such trifling pretexts another time."

The mistress of the house was evidently not to be allowed to leave without the housekeeper's knowledge. Would it be wise to go at all? Viola weighed the matter in her mind carefully, and came first to one decision and then to another. Inclination insisted clamorously that the appointment should be kept. She trembled with happiness at the thought of it. But a thousand fears and scruples still pulled the other way. At last she flung them all aside in desperation, and made a blind resolve that, follow what might, she would go. There was danger and misery in each direction; that fact must be faced.

Boldness might best solve the problem after all. Yes; come weal or woe, she would keep the appointment. She determined to leave the house by the door of the West Wing, as that led into the terrace and was more secluded than the front entrance. She might in that way escape the vigilance of her gaoler.

She glided down the stairs in her black cloak, ghostly and white with excitement. At the foot stood once more the sentinel of Fate,—Mrs. Barber! Viola gave a start and an angry exclamation.

"Going out, Ma'am? On such an afternoon? Do you really think, Ma'am—excusing the liberty—as it's quite conducive?"

"Be good enough to let me judge for myself without interference," said Viola, too excited to smile at the housekeeper's English.

"You will at least take an umbrella, then," urged Mrs. Barber.

Viola accepted the suggestion and hurried out.

Either she must have lost her head in her excitement or she had in good earnest resolved to dare everything and take the consequences; for without finding out whether or not Mrs. Barber were watching her still, she walked straight towards the appointed spot in the direction of the coast-guard station. It seemed to Viola as she moved rapidly across the wet grass, with the rain in her face, that she was being driven by some external power to her fate, and that she had nothing to do with her own act or its consequences. The downs stretched far away, with their veil of rain drifting with the wind, the sea-sound mourning on for ever. These wild bleak stretches were like the Eternity into which the wanderer felt that she was hastening; the sense of personal identity half swallowed up in some larger sense which made her despairingly resigned to whatever might be on its way to her through the mist. Excitement ran so high that it had risen to a sort of unnatural calm; she was in the centre of a moral cyclone; everything was unreal, vision-like; the whole scene and action appeared as a dream from which she must awake to regain the power of will. As she came in sight of the appointed spot in a hollow of the downs behind the shelter of a group of furze bushes, she strained her eyes, in hope of discerning the expected figure. Expected as it was, however, she felt a thrill of joyful and unreasonable surprise when she discerned what she looked for.

From motives of prudence, Harry did not advance to meet her, but when she came drifting up to him, shadow-like through the now driving rain, he held out his arms without a word or a moment's hesitation and drew her into his embrace. At his touch, something in her heart seemed to snap, the strain yielded and she broke into deep convulsive sobs, shaking her from head to foot, but perfectly silent.

He soothed her very quietly, very tenderly; saying little for he saw how overstrained she was. He drew her head

down on his shoulder protectingly, and made her rest there; Viola absolutely passive as if she had lost all power of will. The sobs gradually ceased, and she lay resting quietly exactly as he held her, listening still in a dream to his words of comfort and love and hope. He told her that in a very little while the misery would be over; that for her sake he was ready to face anything; the whole world was before them, and hard as it was, and cruel as it was, so long as they loved one another they might defy it. He explained the plan which he and Sibella had made, and finally he suggested in a quiet matter-of-fact tone the day and the hour for the flight.

She lay quite still listening to him, the tumult and feeling of guilt all gone, and in their place a sense of peace and of deep, almost fathomless joy.

All around them across the downs the rain was sweeping, the wind rising each moment and lashing the sea into angrier storm. The gloom and passion of the day seemed like an echo of their own fate.

"Come what may, these moments have been ours," he said, looking down into her eyes, which were dark and soft with the ecstasy of self-abandonment. "You will hesitate no longer."

"No longer," she answered; "when I am with you it seems right and simple: the sin of it vanishes. I feel that nothing is of any value without you. I leave behind me now no loving heart to be crushed; with you I fear nothing. For you I would do or risk anything. Are you satisfied now?"

His arms tightened round her, and their lips met in a long, never-satisfied kiss.

At that instant, as if in sympathy, the wind leapt up with a fresh gust and swept furiously over the downs. One could hear, the next minute, the breaking of a gigantic wave against the cliff's foot, the scattering of the spray, and then the hoarse resurgance into the deep. To Viola it all spoke in parables.

"If anything happens to part us——" she said dreamily.

"Don't talk of such a possibility."

"Still, there will always be the memory of to-night; it will be enough for me even—even if we see each other for the last time. It seems to me that now I have known the supremest earthly joy, and what more can one ask for?"

She spoke dreamily, peacefully.

"You must not talk about seeing each other for the last time," cried Harry. "I can't face such a thought. I am greedy for happiness. As for you, you need it as a flower needs sunshine, and I mean that you shall have it."

Suddenly, as if to dispute the statement, a human voice rang above the sounds of wind and rain; the dream abruptly ended, and Viola and Harry found themselves confronted by a pair of startled, bewildered blue eyes.

Dorothy!

The girl turned alternately very red and very white, and

began to stammer some confused remarks about coming to call at the Castle—Mrs. Barber had directed her here—she was very sorry—didn't know—couldn't imagine,—and then fairly broke down. Neither Harry nor Viola looked in the least degree like a surprised culprit.

"You know our secret," said Harry, after a significant pause; "what do you mean to do with it?"

Dorothy burst into tears.

Viola stood beside her, looking troubled, but scarcely realising yet what had happened. Strangely enough, the idea of the secret being disclosed did not distress her much. She had been so deeply hurt and wounded, so miserable and desperate, that a public scandal and even Philip's vengeance did not fill her with extreme terror. It was just another misery that had to be borne, that was all. But when it became clear that she had lost Dorothy's friendship, the familiar pain began to creep to its old resting-place in her heart. To lose the girl's love and respect, to fall from the giddy pinnacle where the little hero-worshipper had placed her, down, down to the lowest depths of infamy and shame—this was to Viola beyond all comparison more painful than the prospect of the scorn of all the world put together.

As for poor Dorothy, she was weeping as if her heart would break.

If every human creature, man, woman, and child, had accused her idol of this sin, Dorothy would have contemptuously denied the accusation.

Viola could do no wrong—and now!

It was unbearable, unbelievable. The storm of tears broke out afresh.

"Have I not warned you, Dorothy? Have I not told you that I was capable of wickedness——"

"This is no wickedness," interposed Harry.

"—And you would not believe me."

"But I never thought of such a thing as—as this!" she cried tearfully. "Oh, how *could* you, how could you!"

"If you knew our story and understood things a little better," said Harry, "you would perhaps come to see that your friend is true to herself in acting in defiance of the world. Anyhow, it is not for you to reproach or to judge her. Have you called yourself a Christian from your cradle without learning *that*?"

Dorothy swung round upon him like a tigress.

"It is you, it is you, you wicked, deceitful man! How dare you tempt her to do wrong? I think men are all fiends." Dorothy was almost choked with passion. "It is all your fault, every bit of it—you are a villain, a black-hearted villain. I always hated you! I believe you are the Devil!"

"Whether or not I am the Devil," said Harry, smiling slightly, "I certainly am the person to blame in this matter, if blame there be. I should like to know how you intend to

use your knowledge of our secret. If you mean to divulge it, it is only fair to prepare us."

"Oh, let her tell everything!" Viola exclaimed. "What does it matter? There is no real hope for the future. Let the end come quickly."

For the first time Dorothy allowed her eyes to rest on her friend's face.

"Do you repent, are you sorry?" she asked plaintively.

"No," Viola answered with decision. "I am glad. You will soon forget me, Dorothy; you will find that, after all, Mrs. Pellett is a safer person to have to do with, and you will cease to grieve for me."

"I hate Mrs. Pellett!" cried Dorothy ferociously, "and I never was so miserable in all my life—*never*. I wish you were dead and good—rather than this! Why didn't you die while you were good?"

"Rather, why was I ever born?" cried Viola impetuously. "What does God want with creatures foredoomed to misfortune, foredoomed to sin, foredoomed to be torn in pieces between faith and doubt, impulse and tyranny, duty and passion? Why does He plant feelings strong as death in our hearts, and then call it sin when we yield to them? Why does He fling wretched, struggling, bewildered creatures into an ocean in full storm, and then punish them fiercely because they don't make way against it? It is cruel, it is absurd, it is unreasonable! He drives his creatures to despair; He asks what is impossible, and He punishes like a fiend. God can never have suffered Himself or He would not be so hard and unmerciful! No one is fit to be God who has not suffered."

She stopped breathless.

Dorothy, with the tears still glistening in her eyes, was gazing at her fallen idol in alarmed bewilderment.

A vicar's daughter might well tremble at such an outburst! She began, however, to perceive the desperation in Viola's mood, and to recognise that there were secrets in her life which had brought her to her present sin and disobedience. She had been sorely beset and tempted. What right had any one to judge? She would repent and return to her duty; she was too sweet and noble to forget it for long. Dorothy felt her heart beginning to overflow again towards the beloved of her soul.

"Oh, tell me you repent," she said imploringly, "only tell me you repent."

"I do not repent," said Viola, with a sad little head-shake.

"Well, I can't help it!" exclaimed Dorothy, going up to her and flinging her arms round her neck; "good or bad, right or wrong, I love you, and I can't stop loving you. You are always my dear beautiful one, and I will never desert you, let them say what they will. I will defy them all. If you have done wrong you will be very miserable, and you

may want a friend when *he* deserts you; then you will send for me and I will come to you. I don't care!"

Dorothy went on apostrophising an imaginary audience who were remonstrating: "I don't care; she is more worth loving, sinning or not sinning, than all the rest of you, with your virtues put together! If Mrs. Pellett says nasty things I will—I will trample upon her," pursued Dorothy, grinding her teeth.

"O my dear faithful little friend," Viola interposed sadly, "you don't know what you are saying. We can never see one another again after people begin to speak ill of me. They would speak ill of you too if we were ever to meet."

Her voice trembled, and her kiss was long and tender and sad as a kiss of farewell in which there is no hope.

Dorothy returned it passionately.

"It is not the last, it shall not be the last! You will repent and everything will blow over. But if you don't, I shall stick to you and love you always, whatever you may do. Remember that if all the world deserts you, if Mr. Lancaster deserts you, *I* shall never desert you. You don't know me; you don't know how I love you. To-day when I found this out I was so miserable only because I loved you. But whatever you may do, I shall always love you and be true to you. And this is not Good-bye; I won't consent to say that hateful word till we die, and even then I won't believe it is parting for ever. Heaven would be no heaven for me if *you* were not there!—not with all the harps and the psalms that they could anyway get together. If it's wicked, it's the truth—and I can't help it."

It was some time before Dorothy calmed down sufficiently to yield to Harry's suggestion that the hour was late, and that it would be well for her to return home before it became too dark.

The lateness of the hour made Viola give a little start of alarm. She too ought to have been home before now. If Philip had returned, the danger of discovery would be increased by the delay. Viola laid her hand in Harry's in farewell. He bent down and kissed her, disregarding the presence of Dorothy.

"It is all settled, then," he said, under his breath. "You will make no mistake. Wednesday 24th, at eight o'clock, at the door of the West Wing, unless we send a message through Caleb to announce any alterations of plan. If you should wish to communicate with me, do so also through Caleb. Be brave; almost everything depends upon you. My whole life is now in your hands, as well as your own future."

He looked white and haggard as he bade her a lingering farewell, and watched the two figures hurrying side by side across the uplands. He saw them part at about a hundred yards from the Castle, Dorothy trending off to the right towards the village, Viola leftwards to her home. She looked

back just before entering the house; and Harry knew that her eyes were straining through the dusk to where he stood; then she turned and passed across the threshold out of sight.

* * * * * * * *

Viola found tea awaiting her in the ante-room as usual. Maria welcomed her with much purring and arching of the back.

On her way downstairs, after removing her wet cloak, she saw the library door open, and concluded that Philip had not returned. So far, so good. But when he did return he would question her. What answer could she give? She had once made a declaration of war to Philip, and warned him not to trust her. Why might she not say boldly: "Yes, I have met Harry Lancaster." Then came a qualm of fear. Philip had told her that if he found it necessary he would not shrink from placing her under lock and key. He would swear she was mad; he would place her in charge of a keeper; he would do anything, in short, which her conduct made necessary: so he had plainly told her. Dangerous work indeed to openly defy Philip Dendraith, and not less difficult to defy him in secret.

Half an hour later the front door opened and closed; Philip entered, and Maria left the room. Viola felt a thrill go through her from head to foot.

Philip seemed preoccupied. He sat down beside the table, and poured himself out cup after cup of tea. It had been standing so long that it was black and bitter, but he did not seem to notice it, *connoisseur* though he was. He roused himself presently, and asked what Viola had been doing all the afternoon.

"I have been out," she said.

"Calling?" he enquired.

"No; it was settled that I was not to call to-day."

"Oh! was it?"

"You have been longer than you expected, have you not?" said Viola, with a glance at his preoccupied face, over which now and then a pleased smile flitted.

"Perhaps I have—what's the time? Dear me, six o'clock. I had no idea it was so late."

He poured out another cup of tea and drank it off. Then he rose. "I shall be in the library till dinner-time," he said.

Viola could scarcely believe that the dangerous interview had passed off so easily.

At dinner, to her relief, the perilous subject was not resumed. Husband and wife spent together another of the long gloomy evenings which Viola had always dreaded, day after day as it came. How many more of them were to come? Exactly fifteen if— Ah, that terrible "if"! She paled at the thought of all that it implied.

Facing one another at their solemn dinner-table, waited on by the ever-faithful Cupid, exchanging now and then a few

indifferent remarks, they pursued their own thoughts and lived their divided lives, while the eyes of fading portraits watched them, always with their look of cold and cynical amusement.

After the meal, Viola passed across the echoing hall to the vast drawing-room, Maria, as usual, gliding in after her.

The window was open and let in the salt wind from the sea. Viola, gazing out into the darkness, struggled to realise that her fate was now actually decided; that the crisis of her life was close at hand, that every detail of conduct and circumstance might at any moment change the course of the whole future.

Memories of the afternoon jostled one another in her brain. Her heart-beats quickened at the remembrance of the interview with all its dream-like joy and bewilderment.

Harry could not complain now of a want of return to his devotion. Viola did nothing by halves. Once fully roused, her love was strong, passionate, and unchanging.

A transitory affection was not in her nature. Whosoever had been taken once into her heart was taken into it for ever. The same elements of character which made her capable on occasion of a fury absolutely blind in its vehemence, gave her also the capacity for an infinite devotion.

Harry had reason to rejoice. Viola was shaken completely out of herself; the magic chord had been struck and her whole being was in vibration. Doubts, hesitations were swept away; feebler currents daring to approach the edges of the tempest were caught and overpowered and utterly destroyed.

There was something in the strength and untameableness of her emotions when once roused, that strangely resembled the ocean in its gloomier moods.

Her intense love of the sea, whose voice was in her ears day and night, whose every aspect was familiar, could not have played so large a part in her life without leaving an indelible mark upon her character.

Her instinctive fatalism might have been the lesson of unresting tides, of the waves for ever advancing and retreating, blindly obedient in spite of their resistlessness and their vast dominion.

Viola leant out into the darkness and stretched out her arms as she used to do in childhood, longingly towards the ocean. She was a child again in spirit, in spite of all she had passed through since that midnight, years ago, when she sat by the open window peering into the mysteries, and yearning to throw herself down by the water's edge, and let the waves come up to her and comfort her.

Now she had just the same wild longing to fling herself upon the bosom of the great sea, the same childish belief in the healing power of that tameless giant in whom might and gentleness were so strangely blended.

And now she was to leave this life-long friend; the hoarse voices of the waves would haunt her dreams no more. Tears of regret came into her eyes. Even this vault-like old house with its cavernous echoes, its gaunt passages, its unutterable melancholy, had become strangely, almost unwholesomely, attractive, as such places will to the spirit which they destroy.

The mere fact that it had been the scene of so much torture, so much struggle and conflict, endowed it with a sort of sinister fascination. Every nook and corner of the house, and outside, every cleft and cranny where the little sea-plants nestled out of the wind's pathway, had burnt its image into her brain, etching itself therein with marvellous fidelity through the corroding action of pain. The simplest objects and harmonies became poems and pictures: the curves of the ivy tendrils that climbed over the palings of the garden, the movement of the sea-birds, the quivering of a certain slender little weed that grew high up among the weather-beaten stone-work in a sheltered crevice of its own, solitary, pathetic, a deserted delicate spirit, shivering sensitively when the giant winds came sweeping across the entrance of its tiny sanctuary.

If some day the shelter should crumble or be destroyed, if some day the fragile, exquisite little plant felt upon it the full blast from the west, would it strengthen in resistance, or would the slender stem snap and the flower be whirled away on the breast of the storm?

Viola's thoughts wandered strangely this evening. The afternoon's event was vividly in her consciousness, while a thousand thoughts and memories danced in will-o'-the-wisp fashion, hither and thither, across that constant background.

Then suddenly, with awful and startling completeness, she realised her own position, its peril and its possibilities. A cloud of terror hung above her head: would the plan fail or succeed? If it failed, what then? and if it succeeded, still what then? Everything was dark and mysterious as this windy night! What lay hidden in the future, divided from her now by only fifteen dawns and sunsets, yet almost as mystically unknown as the realms beyond the grave?

A strange vision-like image came drifting into her mind, and she clasped her hands as she gazed with a thrill of dread and horror. A great stir seemed to alter the face of the grey tossing waters, which appeared to be moving from west to east in volumes indescribably vast, as if the great sea itself were being sucked in by some distant whirlpool; and it went sweeping on and on, with dreadful steady swiftness, till of a sudden it came to the edge of a bottomless abyss into which the torrent rushed headlong with a wild and savage roar, dragging after it the waters from all the seas and all the rivers in the world.

And as it fell down and down into the black Infinite, the awful roar gradually died away and the water fell and fell in perfect darkness and perfect silence—for ever!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LAST DAYS.

"LOVE not pleasure; love God. This is the Everlasting Yea, wherein all contradiction is sowed; wherein who so walks, it is well with him."

Through what a fretful freak of memory had these words been stirred up in the mind where they were resting apparently harmless and inactive!

This is the Everlasting Yea.

It was as if a prophet stood in the pathway, warning back. No matter, she would go on; Harry was there beckoning, there was a desperate delight in risking all for him. If she was to be punished for choosing in defiance of law, the supreme earthly happiness, well, she must look her fate in the face and accept the inevitable.

A woman stands always between the devil and the deep sea. She must make her choice.

> "I myself am Heav'n and Hell.
> Heav'n but the vision of fulfilled Desire and Hell the shadow
> Of a soul on fire."

Viola's belief in hell was far more absolute than that of many who fancy that they hold the doctrine in all firmness of orthodoxy. She who had known the atrocious torment of a soul bound close and fast to the Intolerable, had no difficulty in believing in eternal punishment. Had she not herself known the pains of hell in that long torture whose memory clung round her, burning and blazing, only to be quenched with the consciousness of personal identity?

The dreadful sixteen days were slowly creeping on, but, oh! how slowly. It rained incessantly; steady drifting rain, sweeping over the grey sea, and beating a perpetual summons on the westward window-panes. The only break to the feverish monotony was a visit from Dorothy, who came to assure Viola once more of her unalterable devotion.

"I warn you again not to believe in me," said Viola; "even your faithfulness will falter at what I am capable of."

Dorothy shook her head.

"I hope you will do nothing dreadful; but if you did, it would make no difference. Not even if you murdered a few people," she added, laughing, "I should know that they deserved it."

Once Adrienne and Bob Hunter called, when those deliberate sixteen days had marched past to about half their number;

eight behind and eight yet to come. Adrienne was absorbed in the wedding preparations, or seemed to be so; Bob evidently proud and happy, and more than ever liable to athletic sports, though he now sometimes stopped abruptly and apologised. Adrienne had apparently been cruel enough to discourage his pirouettes.

"And you won't be late on Friday, will you?" she said in parting, "and, Viola dear, I am looking forward to having you for a long, long visit as soon as we return home. You will be sure and come, won't you?"

"Oh, you won't care to have me so soon," said Viola, paling a little.

"Nonsense; that's just what I long for. For one thing, I don't want Bob to get tired of me."

Bob pirouetted in a manner which expressed remonstrance.

"One of adamant, you fail to appreciate the good taste of him who adores you to distraction."

"Come away, Bob," said Adrienne. "You are beginning to be tiresome again. Now, don't stand on one toe; you are really too dreadfully like a *première danseuse.*"

Bob, unable to resist the temptation, tripped lightly across the drawing-room, and arrived at the fire-place on tip-toe with one foot in the air and a most engaging smile irradiating his pale, primrose countenance. For this offence he was turned away, amid some laughter by his betrothed.

A couple of days later Bob and Adrienne were standing together before the altar of Upton Church. The bride was calm and quiet, and rather pale; Bob cheery and affable. Viola looked paler than the bride, and her pallor was the more remarkable from the fact that her next neighbour happened to be Dorothy, with her rosy face beaming — like a harvest moon, as her brothers said.

Mrs. Dixie, magnificent and gracious, her ancestor still at her throat, presented another extraordinary contrast to Viola, whose white face, framed by the carving of the old oak stalls, had a look of sad aloofness almost unearthly. Harry, whose eyes were lifted to hers for a moment, read, with a pang of bitter pain, the story that was written in the face. It was a momentary glimpse into the depths of a soul—a glimpse such as is vouchsafed to us, fortunately perhaps, only at rare intervals.

He felt that he had never really understood her grief, her conflict, and all the darkness and lonely horror of her life, until this moment. The attitude and expression told the whole history in a flash. He felt a fierce desire to do some bodily injury to Viola's father, who stood a serene and comfortable wedding-guest, between Mrs. Pellett and Mrs. Russel Courtenay, occasionally whispering pleasant nothings into the ear of Mrs. Courtenay.

Philip, handsome and exquisite, excited in Harry an even greater yearning to inflict a summary punishment. Philip

looked deliberately round on one occasion, as if he felt the vengeful impulse directed against him; he gave a cool stare, and a just at the end, singular little gleam of a smile, which made his adversary feel uncomfortable.

"'Till death do us part."

Philip looked across at his wife. She felt the look, but would not meet it. She knew that it was a taunt, a reminder that she was his till death; that no plots or efforts she could make were sufficient to release her. She knew his delight in making her feel the power and the fruitlessness of resistance. The instinct to torture was strong in the man. He belonged to a type that was only brought to perfection at the time of the Italian Renaissance. Possibly it was part of his policy to frighten Viola into a belief in his ability to frustrate any design she might form. He knew how paralysing to effort is such a belief, and how far more easily his wife would betray her secrets if she were overwhelmed with a baffling conviction that it was useless to try to conceal them.

After the service Mr. Evans mercilessly gave the bride and bridegroom a homily at the altar, in which he enlarged on the wife's mission, the duty of subordination to her husband, and devotion to the sacred cares of home.

He spoke of the duty of the husband to cherish and love his wife, to guide, direct, and strengthen her, supplying the qualities which she lacked, and making of married life a duet of perfect harmony. Then came the signing of names, the usual congratulations, and the return to the Cottage before the departure of the wedded pair. The little drawing-room was crowded with guests, Mrs. Dixie doing the honours with indescribable pride and delight. Viola looked round at the familiar faces, feeling that she stood among the actors of her little world for the last time. In the future they would know her no more. Their part in her destiny was over forever.

Before another week had ended she would be on the other side of an impassable gulf, deep and dark as life itself.

She sat leaning back, watching the crowd with a strange interest. It was incredible that what had been planned should come to pass! These wedding-guests reduced the whole scheme to dreamland; they banished into the vast realms of Impossibility all things which wandered out of the line of their daily pathways. One could scarcely look at them and continue to believe. Arabella was there, stylish and writhing; Mr. Pellett—dragged to the festivity against his will—still looked in the glare of publicity as unhappy as an owl at midday. Mrs. Evans was present, and supremely uncomfortable in that strange assortment of garments wherewith she did heroic honour to the weddings and garden-parties of the Upton world; her husband indulged in clerical jocularities with some of the livelier members of the party; while Dick and Geoffrey (who was just home on leave) talked about trout-fishing in a corner.

The last time, the last time!

Dick came up for a talk (the last talk), friendly and frank as usual.

Dorothy was watching Viola with great anxiety. Harry, from motives of prudence, had held aloof, but Dorothy was evidently afraid that he would sooner or later speak to her, and that somebody would guess their dreadful secret.

There was no doubt that Arabella still had her suspicions. She was talking a great deal to Harry, and very often about Viola. But Harry might have been discussing the attractions of the Queen of the Cannibal Islands, for all that Arabella could gather from his replies.

She presently transferred her notice to Philip.

"I always think a wedding is so depressing, don't you, Mr. Dendraith? I am sure your sweet wife agrees with me."

"My wife, I am convinced, agrees with you in everything."

"Oh now, Mr. Dendraith, you are too bad; I am sure she regards me as very frivolous, but about weddings I do think she would support my view."

"I am sorry to see you so cynical," said Philip.

"Oh, I am not so much cynical as observant," Arabella retorted; "when I look round among my friends and acquaintances, I cannot find more than one or two happy marriages in the whole circle. I believe it is because men will smoke so much."

"The whole secret," said Philip. "My wife won't let me smoke more than two cigars a day."

"Really, how wise of her, and how nice of you to be so obedient! Men are generally so very wilful, you know. I shall really have to consult Mrs. Dendraith about her system of management. You seem to be in perfect order, and yet not crushed."

"Not at all crushed," said Philip; "my wife says she doesn't like to see a man's spirit broken."

Arabella laughed. ("He rules her with a rod of iron," she said to herself, "and she lives in deadly fear of him.") "Oh, Mr. Dendraith, I want you and Mrs. Dendraith to come over to tea with me next Tuesday. There are one or two people coming whom I should like you to meet."

"Thank you," Philip answered, "I should have enjoyed it immensely; but on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday I shall be in town. I have had important engagements for some time."

"Now I am *certain* they are of mushroom growth," cried Arabella; "it is very unkind. You and Mrs. Dendraith never will come and see me."

"I assure you the engagement is a genuine one; how can you be so suspicious? Cynical again! Viola, my dear, Mrs. Courtenay declares that I am manufacturing engagements; can't you testify to the antiquity of my appointments for Tuesday and Wednesday of next week?"

Viola confirmed her husband's statement.

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you if that's the case, but it's very tiresome of you. I am glad to find you tell your wife of all your engagements; without, as you say, breaking your spirit, I can see that she is very firm with you."

"She is," said Philip, "but I know it is for my good."

The bride now began to bid farewell to her friends, before departing in her lady-like grey dress, which every one said was so becoming. She behaved with great self-possession, though one could see that she was moved. Mrs. Dixie folded her in a vast embrace, from which Adrienne emerged rather less exquisitely smooth than before, leaving her mother weeping with great assiduity and much lace pocket-handkerchief. They were genuine tears that she shed, although this was one of the happiest days of her life.

When the bride came to Viola she gave her a long, heartfelt kiss. "Be brave and true to yourself, dear," she whispered.

"Good-bye, good-bye," Viola returned.

"We shall soon meet again," said Adrienne, with a cheerful nod, passing on to Dorothy.

"Good-bye," repeated Viola.

In how short a time was Adrienne to look back at that parting with a shudder of disgust; in how short a time was the memory that once she had called Viola Dendraith friend to be thrust aside, whenever it intruded, with horror and dismay. A life of smooth prosperity and domestic contentment was the reward of Adrienne's action at this crisis of her career; and every day of her well-appointed existence sent her drifting further in spirit from the tortured, desperate, bewildered creature whose straying footsteps she had so earnestly sought to guide in straighter pathways, whose faults she had so conscientiously striven to correct. Adrienne had the consoling thought that she had at any rate done her best to save her erring friend from the abyss of guilt and ruin towards which she had been drifting.

The bride and bridegroom once departed, the guests began to leave. Dorothy came up to Viola and folded her in a Herculean embrace. "You are worth all the rest of them put together," she exclaimed. "I have been watching them, and their airs and graces, beside you." Dorothy gave a gesture of contempt. "They look so silly," she said with severe energy; "they mince and wriggle, and snip and sniggle, and go on like marionettes, who have got wires where their souls ought to be! And you—you seem like a beautiful, calm statue among all these fidgetting dolls."

"O Dorothy! you *are* extravagant," Viola exclaimed with a sad little smile.

"No, I am only telling the exact truth," said Dorothy.

"Are you coming, dear?" her mother called to her; "we are going."

Mrs. Evans shook hands with Viola, and said she hoped she

would come and see them soon at the Rectory; it was so long since she had been there. Then she passed on to collect the rest of her daughters.

"Good-bye," said Dorothy with another fervent embrace. "You won't do anything dreadful, will you?" she whispered pleadingly. "Please, please don't; but if you do, it will make no difference. I shall love you always."

"Ah! good-bye, and go," cried Viola with a break in her voice, kissing the girl and thrusting her hastily away, as she felt her self-command beginning to fail.

Dorothy gave a parting look and smile, and followed her mother from the room. And in a few days even that loving and faithful heart had turned against the miserable woman who watched her depart, knowing that they had met for the last time. The day was at hand when Dorothy would tear the memory of her idol from her heart with horror and anguish—when she would catch her breath at the mention of Viola's name, turning aside in miserable silence as it was tossed about from mouth to mouth with insult and execration.

Suddenly, as Viola remained with her eyes fixed on the spot where she had seen Dorothy pass from the room, that strange image of hastening waters appeared again before her mind's eye almost as vividly as when she had stood at the window looking out to sea. Again there was the mysterious stir; again the whole ocean seemed to be drawn away and away, from west to east, towards a bottomless gulf, which was drinking up all the seas and rivers, sucking in, attracting, constraining, forever insatiable and forever empty. With awful tumult and distraction the waters rushed to their doom, boiling, seething, rebelling in vain against the power that drew them, with ever-accelerating speed, onwards to the inevitable verge. And then once more, with a bound like that of some wild creature hunted to his death, they leapt over the brink, pouring down, and down, and down, in one smooth mighty stream, into the infinite darkness and infinite silence forever.

Viola awoke with a sudden bewildered start to find Geoffrey standing before her laughing.

"What's the matter, Ila?" he asked. "Are you walking in your sleep? I have asked you a question three times, and you only stared at me, with no speculation in your eye. Suppose a wedding *is* a thought-provoking sort of affair to the married!"

"You will come and see me, Geoffrey," said Viola, when after some further conversation he said he must be going.

"Oh yes, I'll come of course," said Geoffrey, "in a day or two. The uncle has offered me one or two days' fishing at Clevedon, so I shan't be able to come till Tuesday or Wednesday. When I do come I should like to stay the night."

"Do come on Tuesday, then. I want very much to see you."

"Why, my dear, of course I shall come as soon as I can. I thought I might perhaps have an invitation to spend part of my leave with you. I don't wish to push myself—always was retiring. I've got a lot of things I want to talk to you about," he went on, more seriously. "I have been reading Carlyle, and by Jove— Well, we'll talk it over later on. Good-bye just now. The Governor's going. I shall probably come to you Wednesday. Tuesday's rather busy."

"Oh, do come on Tuesday," said Viola, glancing swiftly round, to make sure that Philip was out of ear-shot.

"Why do you want me so particularly to come on Tuesday?" asked Geoffrey.

"I would still rather you came to-morrow or on Monday."

"Well, if you are so set upon it, I will try and turn up on one day or other. Mustn't come on Wednesday in any consideration evidently. Something up on Wednesday; well, I hope it will go off well, and be a grand success. My blessing on you; good-bye."

Viola wished that Geoffrey's voice were not so exceedingly sonorous and hearty. Yet surely Philip could not have heard what he said from the other end of the room, through the hubbub of talk and laughter. The incident nevertheless made her feel uneasy.

"Now, Viola," said her aunt, coming up and touching her on the shoulder, "why have you never said a word to me all day? Well, how are you, and what have you been doing, and what are you going to do? You look pale, my dear. You shut yourself up in that old house and get dull. Now you must really come and see me. I have a friend I want you to know—Arabella's sister, Mabel Turner, but not so foolish as Arabella; one family can't be expected to produce two masterpieces. She is coming on Wednesday evening, and you must drive over to dinner and stay the night."

"I fear, Aunt Augusta, I can't do that," cried Viola. "I——"

"Now, my dear, I take no refusal," said Lady Clevedon; "you are getting into stay-at-home ways that are exceedingly bad for you. I simply insist upon your coming to me on Wednesday; so say no more about it."

"But, Aunt Augusta, it is impossible."

"Oh, stuff and nonsense! you have nothing in the world to do. Why can't you come?"

Viola shook her head and tried to turn the subject.

"Now, no more nonsense; you have got to do as you are told. Women are nothing if not obedient. I shall expect you on Wednesday not later than five o'clock. Now, good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye, Aunt Augusta," Viola said with a slight unintentional stress on the word. Every parting to-day had for her the sad solemnity of a last farewell

Lady Clevedon laughed. "One would fancy Viola was going to mount the scaffold to-morrow," she said.

Before leaving, Lady Clevedon spoke to Philip about his wife's growing dislike to mingling with her fellow-creatures.

'It is really very bad for her, and you ought to check it. I wanted her to come to tea with me next week, but she says it is impossible, which—like a problem in Euclid—is absurd. What can be her reason?"

"She may have Dorothy Evans with her, perhaps, next week, as I am to be away," said Philip.

"As if she couldn't bring the girl. Tell Viola that I shall expect them both."

Philip delivered the message when he and his wife were driving home across the downs.

"I suppose you will go?" he said indifferently.

"I decided not to do so," Viola replied.

"Do you intend never to go anywhere again? Why will you not go to your aunt's?"

"Why, after all, *should* I go? I am not meant for society."

"I wonder what you *are* meant for."

"A target for other people's wit and other people's cruelty," said Viola.

"A target that answers back is a novelty," said Philip. "A target has the Christian's virtue: it turneth the other cheek also."

They drove for the rest of the way home in almost complete silence. The evening closed in with recurring rain, which beat upon the windows of the house with mournful persistence for many stormy hours.

Viola sat by the big fireplace, a book, for appearance' sake, in her lap, looking into the fire and thinking, thinking. And outside the grey sea beat for ever upon the beach. There was no escaping from its voice. It was like a full-toned chorus to the drama of life, mournful and prophetic.

Viola's thoughts wandered to her friend.

Poor Adrienne! what were the waves foretelling for her? Would she settle quietly down to her lot and forget how all her new ease and rest from anxiety had been purchased? Would the knowledge that she had done it console her? "Every woman has her price," Philip had said. Adrienne's price had been found and paid.

On Sunday morning Goeffrey appeared. "You see I have come to-day," he said, "since you are having high jinks on Wednesday to which only the very select are invited. Philip says you aren't going to church; so let us have a talk." Bringing out a tattered volume of Carlyle, he opened it on his knee, drawing up his chair before the fire. He wanted to know what Viola thought of a celebrated passage in "Sartor Resartus" which he read aloud: "Foolish soul, what act of legislature was there that thou shouldst be happy? A little while ago thou hadst no right to be at all. What if thou wert born

and predestined not to be happy, but to be unhappy: art thou nothing other than a vulture then, that fleest through the Universe seeking after somewhat to eat, and shrieking dolefully because carrion enough is not given thee? There is in Man a higher than love of Happiness; he can do without Happiness, and instead thereby find Blessedness."

"Is that all true, do you think?" the young man asked wistfully. "This," said Viola, "is really our mother's teaching in other words: that we ought to submit to what is sent us to bear, and to aim at something higher than happiness."

"What is blessedness, do you suppose?" Goeffrey enquired. "Can't remember that I ever came across it. Don't know what to make of the whole passage. Ought we to try to be blessed and never mind about being happy all our lives? And, Viola, how do you suppose one can set about being blessed? I don't know, for the life of me, and yet it seems as if that doctrine led one on to a high mountain and gave one a grander view of things. I don't know how to express it, of course, but you know what I mean."

Viola looked very thoughtful as she sat gazing into the fire.

Was it Fate that had sent her this second message from the great apostle of endurance and heroism?

"Love not pleasure, love God."

That was the first message. And now came this second one: "Why shouldst thou be happy?"

Were Harry and Sibella mistaken after all? Was it nobler to cast happiness to the winds—accepting the fact that there is indeed no reason why one should be happy—than to rebel against circumstances divinely ordered, against the teaching of one's childhood, against the laws of society and of the mighty past?

Viola was always open to teaching of this character; long years had worn a groove in her mind where such thoughts flowed smoothly and familiarly. She was haunted and troubled long after Geoffrey had gone. The ideas on which she had resolved to act were not originally her own; she had not evolved them for herself, built them up from observation and thought, from the thoughts of others that were ready to mix with and fructify her own. The ideas were in her mind still as things separate and distinct; they had no long-tried supports to uphold them; they were isolated and unnourished. Such are not the strong buttressed ideas to inspire bold and consistent action. They may dissipate at any moment, and leave the actor without light or motive, the slave of every impulse, of every turn of events.

The turn of events which helped to decide Viola's fate to-day was the behaviour of her husband. Every day the rack was being screwed tighter till human endurance could withstand no more. Viola, whose power of projecting herself into another mind was limited strictly to cases where the mind somewhat

resembled her own, had never realised how intensely annoying to Philip her conduct had been; she failed to understand that any conduct on her part could seriously affect one so cold and strong and self-sufficient as her husband. His contemptuous manner, his apparent determination to humiliate her by every device, caused her to imagine that she was powerless to make him wince in return. It is possible that had she known how he was smarting under the repeated evidences of her aversion, the history of her life might have had a different ending. But she did not know, and the drama played itself out inexorably.

Philip's studied insolence and insults after Geoffrey left, indeed before he left, put to flight all effects of reading "Sartor Resartus." There might be something higher than happiness, but it was not to be attained under the same roof with Philip Dendraith, it was not to be obtained by a woman who for the sake of food and house-room and social consideration remained his wife; unhappiness one could endure, but degradation and indignity never.

Women in the past had thought it no crime to take their own lives rather than submit to that. Perhaps they were wrong, but Viola's heart leapt up in sympathy towards them. They were her true sisters, in spite of all the years that raised a host of shadows between them. She understood their desperation; she knew how their hearts had burnt and blazed within them, how death to them had seemed the sweetest thing in all the world.

"Why shouldst thou be happy?" Perhaps there was no good reason. But "why shouldst thou live to be tortured and insulted?" Was there any better reason for that?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DARKNESS.

DURING these last slowly-moving days Maria followed her mistress everywhere. She would scarcely allow her out of her sight. Perhaps Viola's restlessness may have warned this terribly intelligent animal that something unusual was in the air.

The creature seemed to be striving in her own eloquent fashion to comfort her mistress, and to assure her that, under all vicissitudes of fortune, she might confidently count upon the support of her dumb and faithful friend.

"Ah! what shall I do without you, my dear?" Viola used to ask sorrowfully. "If I could but take you with me—!"

Still the wild weather continued, rain and wind beating up from the south-west. There were rumours of wrecks along the coast, and at Shepherd's Nook the life-boat had gone out to save the crew of a sinking vessel.

If on Wednesday it were still so stormy, how would they be able to effect their escape by sea? Well, no doubt Harry had thought of that, and would have some other plan. It was useless for Viola to trouble about details.

Monday was still stormy, though there were gleams of tearful sunshine lighting up in patches an agitated sea.

"If this rain lasts," said Philip, "I think I shall give up my visit to London."

Viola's face was half turned from him, but he saw the colour rush into her cheeks.

"I can postpone it till next week if necessary. It will depend on the weather."

Bright sunshine on Tuesday morning decided the question. Viola stood on the doorstep, watching the phaeton which took Philip to the station growing smaller and smaller, till at last it disappeared in the distance of the sunlit downs. If all went according to their plan, she had seen her husband for the last time! There was not one memory in the whole of her married life to make her think of that with compunction or regret! She stood there in the sunshine, with the wind playing round her, long after Philip was out of sight. When she did move, it was not to return to the house, but to wander out into the sunlit garden by the beautiful terraces where the tendrils of the creepers were nodding and swaying, and the rain-sprinkled cobwebs fringed the pathway with brilliants. Maria was following, daintily picking her steps along the wet paths, nimbly springing on and off the parapets as her mistress strolled slowly, thoughtfully among the flowers. Only for short intervals during the whole of this day did Viola remain within doors. In the morning she drove to the Manor-House, to pay the old place and its inhabitants a farewell visit. It was looking its serenest and sweetest. Terrible was the ache at her heart, as she strolled once more round the familiar gardens, passed once more through the old rooms where every nook and corner had vivid associations, where everything spoke of the dead woman who had borne so much and sacrificed so much, and all in vain. What would the mother think of her daughter *now* if she knew? Well, if she knew in good earnest,—not as a limited creature knows, who has only one or two little strings in his nature that vibrate responsively but as a liberated spirit might be supposed to know, who overlooks the whole field of human emotion,—then Viola thought that her mother would not blame her.

No nook or corner was left unvisited. Viola bid farewell to all her old friends—Thomas and the under-gardener, and —most heart-breaking of all—to old William, whose eyes

filled with tears at her words, and perhaps still more at the tone in which they were uttered,

"It always does me good to see you, Miss—Mum, as I should say! There, I don't believe as there's many like you, more's the pity: the old place ain't been itself since you left, and never will be. God bless you!"

Viola turned away. In a few short days would he recall his blessing? Would he be against her also? Would he take the usual simple course, and condemn because he could not understand? Perhaps not. There was something large and generous in the tender old heart: though he might grieve and marvel and shake his head, yet perhaps he would not judge; he would simply leave the matter alone, and go his own quiet way, reviling not, but trusting.

Another trying farewell was with Geoffrey, though, like so many pitiful things, it had its comic side. The young fellow was in one of his wildest moods—jovial, hearty, full of life, hope, and spirit. His "good-bye" was naturally of the most casual and common-place description. He said he was coming over to see his sister on Thursday,—not to-morrow, oh! no; he remembered the mysterious "high jinks" appertaining to Wednesday, and tactfully forbore to intrude. But on Thursday when the excitement of the "high jinks" had died away, he should claim a little sisterly attention while he a tale unfolded. Geoffrey handed her into the phaeton with a fraternal nod of farewell, but Viola put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Geoffrey dear," she said, "we have always been good friends, haven't we?"

"Why, yes, of course we have," Geoffrey returned in astonishment; "who said we haven't? Because if you'll show me the fellow I'll knock him down."

"Oh! I don't want you to knock any one down," said Viola with a sad little laugh. "I want you always to remember what good friends we have been, and how fond I was of you, and always shall be. And—and think as kindly of me as you can. Good-bye." She kissed him again, and then before Geoffrey recovered from his astonishment the phaeton was half-way down the avenue.

Towards evening the weather showed ominous signs of a change for the worse. Black clouds were gathering over the sea, and the wind had a sound which the coast-guard people knew so well betokened storm.

All promises were fulfilled.

This last sleepless night in the glooming home was wildly tempestuous. Viola, with every nerve on the stretch, shivering from head to foot, lay counting the hours as they were deliberately tolled out by the great courtyard clock. She paced up and down her room when it became impossible any longer to remain still, listening to the familiar sounds of the storm.

The night wore itself out, but the rain and wind had only slightly abated by the morning.

Perhaps it was Viola's excited fancy that made her think that Mrs. Barber was more watchful than usual to-day.

There was no evading her—or so it seemed. The talent which the respectable person displayed in finding excuses for her presence was as astounding as her admirable acting—if acting it were.

Viola was anxiously on the alert all the morning in case any message should come from Harry. Regardless of Mrs. Barber, she braved rain and wind, and went to the ruin, so that in case Caleb had any note for her he might deliver it without difficulty. But Caleb was purely and freezingly philosophic this morning. He was absorbed in the Absolute, and had nothing to say on any other subject, unless it were a word or two on the Infinite.

A stranger go-between in a secret correspondence can scarcely be imagined. He appeared to have no curiosity on the subject whatever. For all that one could tell, the philosopher may have thought that he was carrying letters on the subject of the differential calculus. The day wore on, but no message came; the plan was evidently to be carried out as arranged.

The hours were like so many grievous burdens, heavy to endure; but they stole gradually away, the clocks announcing, with what seemed unusual emphasis, the passing of them one by one into Eternity. Viola had decided to make herself ready to start, having hat and cloak downstairs, so that in a second she could fling them on and go. It would be well not to leave a moment too soon, because of Mrs. Barber. The moon was rising, but there was fear that the clouds might obscure its light at the critical moment. One thing must be done before leaving: and that was, to take her treasures from the oak cabinet in the west wing—Harry's gift and his letters. She had not dared to take these things before, for fear of Philip's discovering and confiscating them. Once possessed of these, she would hasten downstairs to the door of the west wing leading onto the terrace, where Harry would be awaiting her.

Again and again, Viola found herself overwhelmed with unbelief in the reality of the events which were passing, panorama-like, before her. It *could* not be true; it *must* be a gigantic and terrible dream. Presently she would awake and find herself going through the daily routine exactly as before, without hope of release. The hours were drifting on, the throbbing moments passing—passing, till the appointed time began to draw near. Maria was on the hearth-rug, purring softly. Viola stooped down and lifted the creature in her arms.

"Good-bye, you dear and faithful one; good-bye," she said, burying her face in the soft fur and laying her cheek against it caressingly. As she stood thus with the animal lying in her

arms, the door opened behind her very softly, and then closed again as softly. No one entered, and Viola remained unaware of what had occurred. She glanced at the clock.

"I must go," she said, giving the cat a last caress and laying her down again before the fire. Putting on her hat and cloak, she opened the door carefully, looked up and down the passage, and then hurried along past the cynical portraits in the hall to the door leading to the west wing. Once on the other side of that, she breathed more freely. She hesitated for a moment, and then taking the key from the hall side of the door, she locked it on the western side and put the key in her pocket. At least she would be secure from Mrs. Barber's espionage. She had exactly five minutes to get her treasures and be at the terrace-door to meet Harry as appointed.

A gust of air greeted her as she entered the room. The storm apparently had blown in one of the lozenged window-panes. Viola felt a superstitious thrill of fear, as if the gust had been a warning to her not to cross the threshold. But at the same moment she knew that no warning could retard her now—not even that too familiar moan in the sound of the sea prophesying woe. She advanced towards the cabinet, opened it, and took out the packet of letters and Harry's wedding gift with trembling fingers. The light of the rising moon was sufficient to enable her to see what she was doing. She consulted her watch; longing feverishly for the end of this lonely suspense, longing to get once for all beyond the spell-like influence of this house, where she seemed to feel Philip's presence in the very air.

She put the letters in her pocket, and took the knife from its hiding place. How to carry it? She thought for a moment, and then thrust it into the coils of her hair, so that the weapon was almost concealed. She was hurrying towards the door when she became aware of a tall form emerging out of the darkness, and then without apparent interval her wrist was gripped by a human hand, powerful and merciless. She uttered a stifled shriek, and then a low moan of despair.

"Very well planned for a beginner, my dear; shows a real bent in that direction, which if followed might lead to superior results. One would never suspect you of such things: therein lies your advantage."

Philip still held her wrist between his fingers, which were closed upon it as a vice. The two stood confronting one another thus—Viola white as death, with the hard-set look of a desperate and a determined woman; Philip with a smile on his face, prepared to enjoy himself.

"Pardon my detaining you," he said, "especially as you are keeping Mr. Lancaster waiting out in the cold; on a stormy night like this it seems especially inconsiderate. But you can lay the blame on me: say it was entirely my fault, and that I humbly apologise for any inconvenience I may have caused him."

Viola made an effort to free her wrist, but the hard fingers closed round it more tightly.

"Not just yet, if you please; I have so much to talk about. This little plan of yours—I must really repeat my congratulations—I have watched it through all its incipient stages with unbounded interest. A plan like that is born, not made."

He released her hand, but placed himself with his back to the door, so that she still remained his prisoner.

Viola's eyes were wild and desperate.

"What are you going to do?" she asked; "what punishment have you in store for me?"

"Punishment! How can you talk of punishment?—one who adores you——"

The smile of mockery, triumph, and conscious possession made the blood mount impetuously to her very temples.

She looked round wildly for a means of escape. The window?

"Fifty feet from the ground, my love; and although, no doubt, adoring arms would be ready to receive you when you reached *terra firma*, still I should not advise the attempt, even in the course of virtue."

"Can't you say what you mean to do, at once, without all these taunts? Surely the fact of your victory is enough for you."

"Certainly; but your curiosity as regards the future seems a little morbid. During my visit to town I have secured the services of a most superior person who will henceforth be always your cheerful and instructive companion. I hope sincerely that you will agree with her, as the arrangement is permanent. All preliminaries are now settled, and the superior person will enter upon her duties to-morrow. You ask perhaps why I returned to-day instead of to-morrow, as arranged. Simply because I had my reasons for thinking that something was going on. I really am not in a position to afford to lose you thus prematurely. You see, my dear, you are an article of 'vertu' which cannot be easily renewed, a luxury that a man can't afford to repeat too frequently. In point of fact, if you will excuse my mentioning it, you come rather expensive. The original consideration was heavy, but that would have been nothing had it stopped there. The truth is, however, that your amiable father still applies to me for money to get him out of disgraceful difficulties, and for the sake of avoiding family scandal I allow myself to be thus bled with a sweetness of temper which I fear sometimes borders on weakness. The outlay appears especially ruinous from the fact that still I am disappointed of an heir; a matter to me of serious moment. All things considered, therefore, my love, you will admit that you have been somewhat of the nature of a *sell*, and you will pardon my endeavoring to prevent your bringing the matter to a climax by disgracing yourself and me in this spirited manner. It will not do, be-

lieve me, and you must really oblige me by banishing the idea from your mind as an impossibility. I think you will have no difficulty in accomplishing this when you receive the able help of my Superior Person. After her advent I shall be able to leave you with every confidence, and perfect peace of mind. This Pillar of Strength has been accustomed to the care of what are pleasingly termed *mental cases*, and she is therefore as keen and quick as a detective. Charming and most clever is my superior person. I long to introduce her to you. I know you will love her."

"Is your cruelty not satiated yet?" asked Viola at length. "Will you not end this interview and let me go out of your sight? If I am to be a prisoner, show me my dungeon and leave me in peace. Only let me go. I can bear no more."

Philip took a cat-like step nearer to her. "You will not go out of my sight this night, my dear," he said, looking into her face with a keen enjoyment of her torture. Her shrinking movement and low cry seemed to rouse his worst instincts.

"Ah! you may shrink, but shrinking will not help you. What does it matter to me? You have got to learn, once for all, to whom you belong. I am not a man to be trifled with, believe me. What is mine is mine. You were about to make a vast mistake in that interesting point, which I am happily in time to rectify. Now is the moment for an impressive lesson, for there must really be no uncertainty in these matters. I am deeply grieved to keep your friend out in the rain all this time, but really, considering the circumstances, I think he can hardly be surprised, A fond husband parted for two days from his wife—" He smiled in a way that always maddened her, as he advanced quickly, and took her in his arms, bending down to kiss her as she struggled violently to free herself. "It's no use struggling," he said, "for I am considerably stronger than you are, and I intend to stand no nonsense. If it pleases me to kiss you I shall kiss you. It is my right, gainsay it if you can. I am resolved that you shall understand. You are behaving as a fool or a spoilt child, and must be treated as such."

Overcoming her frantic resistance he kissed her long and steadily on the lips, partly because it pleased him to do so, partly, it seemed, because it tortured her. Then he let her go She stood before him mad with fury, and for the moment literally speechless.

"Oh, I could tear myself to pieces!" she said wildly.

Philip looked at her and smiled. It was a game of cat and mouse.

"A very pretty and becoming little passion, my dear, which I must quench with kisses. You really can't call me a tyrant, when that is my only form of chastisement: kisses till you are subdued."

He laughed at her desperation as he advanced once more to inflict the "tender punishment," as he called it.

She darted away from him to the window and tried to tear it open, but he followed her, laying his hand upon her arm.

"Couldn't have a suicide in the family on any account, nor can I permit you to summon your lover to the rescue. Really, your impetuosity is becoming dangerous. My Superior Person must hasten. Meanwhile I will cherish you under my own wing, enjoying all the lovely changes of your April moods. What, not subdued yet? more kisses required?"

"Oh! do you want to drive me mad?" cried Viola hoarsely, standing at bay, with her hand on the casement, leaning backwards away from Philip's arms.

"I am inconsiderate," he said, "to keep you parleying here at this time of the night. I will take you to your room. Oh no, I can't trust you to go alone. Come with me; I am too affectionately anxious about you to let you out of my sight. And then my mood is tender, in spite of a slight coldness on your part which I am always in hopes that my persistent devotion will be able to overcome. Allow me."

He put his arm round her to lead her away.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me, I tell you, or I shall go raving mad!"

"I fear that I should be unable to detect the moment of transition," said Philip, calmly persevering.

He stopped abruptly to examine something.

"Ah! what's this glittering bauble in your hair? This must come out, and at once."

"Don't touch it!" cried Viola, and her hand was on the hilt of the knife almost at the same instant that Philip's words were uttered. She drew it out and held it behind her defiantly.

"Is the toy so precious? A dangerous plaything, and most unsuitable in the hands of a refractory pupil undergoing much needed instruction in the nature and duties of wifehood. Come, now, give it up quietly; it will be far better for you in the end. We must have no violence, if we can possibly avoid it; that sort of thing is really very 'bad form,' and you know my horror of 'bad form.'"

He held out his hand for the weapon.

"Don't oblige me to take it from you by force. You must try to realize the situation. If I could make you understand that somehow or another, by fair means or by foul, I intend to reduce you to submission, and that *immediately*, you would save yourself a lot of fruitless trouble. Your conduct throughout our married life has been intolerable, and we must have an end of it. Women can't be reasoned with; they can only be governed autocratically. You have confirmed my opinion on that subject. Sheer will-force is the only argument that goes home to them. Now, then, we under-

stand each other. Give me that offensive weapon and come with me; I have been long enough in this musty and extremely depressing old room; the associations are gruesome; one can sniff Death in the very air. Come with me. Let's have no more nonsense to-night. I have no doubt but that by this time our friend has become tired of waiting, and has returned wiser and sadder to his fireside—perhaps also rather damper. But his mother, we all know, is thoughtful about gruel and a hot bath in such cases, so there is really no cause for compunction on your part. You did your best; he could not ask more. Come with me."

"I will not come with you; I will not pass another night under your roof, though I die for it!" said Viola.

"And how are you going to avoid it, my dear?" asked Philip. "The woman doesn't know when she is beaten! What power on earth can protect you now against me? You yourself have locked the door of the wing communicating with the other part of the house, and cut yourself off from chance interposition. Besides, who would help a wife against her husband?"

She kept her eyes fixed upon him, watching every movement, desperate and defiant. He moved close up to her to take possession of the knife and to lead her away.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me, or—!" The rest of the sentence was lost in a sound of loathing and horror, for Philip had disobeyed her. Advancing till she was driven against the corner of the window and there was no possible loop hole of escape, he took her in his arms deliberately.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," he said. "Do what you are told. Give me that weapon at once and come."

His touch, constraining, insolent as it was, forcing her in spite of all her resistance towards the door, excited her to very madness. His lips touched her cheek; his hand was seeking hers to seize the knife, when in an instant—a horrible instant of blinding passion—the steel has flashed through the air with a force born of the wildest fury—there was a cry, a curse, a groan, a backward stagger, and Philip lay at his wife's feet mortally wounded. For a second—but ah! how interminable was that second!—there was silence within that chamber of Death. The everlasting boom of the waves, with their moan and lamentation, sounded loudly outside—the distant chant of many voices mourning.

"May you be damned!"

Philip gave a groan and tried to raise himself on his arm, but fell back helpless. The blood was flowing fast from the wound. His eyes were blazing with fury and hatred indescribable. He gathered his forces for a dying curse.

"May the gallows spare you for a more hideous fate; may you suffer all that your soul most abhorrs; may you be the tool and chattel and plaything of men; may they drag you to the lowest depths of humiliation; may indignity be heaped on

indignity; may you be outcast, homeless, praying for death; may the pride of your soul be withered and utterly rooted out; may you die in shame and misery; may your soul be damned for everlasting—*murderess!*"

His voice gave way, and he sank back panting.

Almost at the same instant a man's step was heard in the passage outside. With a look of fury the wounded man struggled up for the last time, tried to utter some words—evidently of unspeakable passion—and fell back never to stir again.

The footsteps stopped outside the door, which was thrown open, and Harry Lancaster entered the room.

He paused abruptly, and there was a moment of dead silence. Viola was standing with head held high, the knife still in her hand, and in her eyes a look that made the very heart stop beating. At her feet lay a human form, perfectly still, the white face upturned, one hand with the thumb pressed inward, conspicuous in the moonlight, which was tracing the outline of the lozenge panes delicately upon the polished floor. Beside the prostrate figure was something glistening, something——

"Good God! what is it? What have you done?"

"Come and see," she answered, with a wild sort of exultation. She went to him, put her arm in his, and drew him eagerly forward. It was a ghastly moment for him!

"You see I have killed him with this knife;" she held it aloft and then threw it on the floor.

"Oh, you are mad!" he exclaimed. "*You* have not done this! Let me look at you."

He turned her face in the full moonlight, and scanned the haggard features with an awful dread in his heart—yet almost a hope, so desperate was the crisis.

"Are you mad? Oh! tell me, are you mad, you poor tortured child?" he groaned.

"Mad? Oh no! I meant to do it. I knew it would kill him. I would do it again—I would do it again!" she cried in wild excitement. "I leave a life behind me so loathsome, so intolerable—Yes," she broke off fiercely, "I would do it again."

"Oh, spare yourself—have mercy on yourself!"

"But it is true; it is the only thing that I can bear to let my thoughts rest upon, the only spot in my black life that is not black to me."

She held out her right hand and looked at it in the moonlight.

"Call me guilty: it is sweet to me—sweet and clean and wholesome! I am guilty; I have murdered him." She drew an ecstatic breath.

Harry looked at her aghast. Say what she might, she was mad.

"His blood seems to wash away some of the blackness, the

hideousness of the past—if that could be—but oh, no, no !"—(she thrust out her hands, shrinking back)—"nothing can do that; there are no words for it;—the horror is in my heart, and it burns there; it burns—it will never cease burning—never, never !"

She flung her arms over her head, and then sank cowering to the floor, leaning against the wall beneath the window, and always shrinking, shrinking, as if in a helpless effort to escape from herself. Harry gave a gesture of despair. The horror of the situation became more and more appalling the longer he thought of it. What was to be done ? Viola's guilt must be discovered with daybreak, and meanwhile where was she to go ? what was she to do ? The blood-stained knife lay at his feet: his own thrice-accursed gift ! He picked it up and flung it out of the window, whence it flew in a long curving line, quivering with the intense force of the impulse, away over the cliff-side and down down to the greedy waves below.

"Will you come with me instantly ?" he said. "There is no time to lose, and I must save you."

"Save me ?—save *me ?*"

For an instant—a horrible instant—a flicker of repulsion passed across his face ! The scene, the circumstance, the ghastliness of the doom, seemed to have overwhelmed him.

Suddenly, as if she had been struck, Viola shrank away with a half-articulate cry which rang echoing through the room and made the very heart stop beating, and a sickening chill run through the frame from head to foot. It was the cry of a spirit hurled from its last refuge, cut off from human pity and fellowship, cast out from the last sanctuary of human love.

With that momentary flash of repulsion and horror, a fathomless abyss seemed to open its jaws, black as the grave, but infinitely deeper than that resting-place of the weary who have lived and died uncursed. For these lay waiting a haven quiet and reposeful; but for her whose every breath had been cursed, who was stained and tainted through and through with shame and crime—for her was only a bottomless grave where she would fall and fall, weighted with her crime and her curse, through the darkness for ever and ever !

The words of passionate entreaty which Harry was now pouring out seemed to strike on deaf ears. The conviction that the curse was to be fulfilled had already taken root, and it was fast becoming immovable.

"Viola, listen to me," cried Harry, grasping her hand; "rouse yourself and try to understand. Don't you realise that we must go away from here ? I have just been explaining—only you did not seem to hear what I said—that we can put off in Caleb's boat, which lies about two miles on the farther side of the headland. The cliff is supposed to be inaccessible in that part, and so it was till a few days ago, when Caleb—but I will tell you about that afterwards; I want you

to come away now, without more loss of time. Viola, Viola, do you hear me? I must save you."

"But I can't be saved," she said calmly, "don't you see? I am lost and cast out for ever; his curse is upon me; the hand of Fate is upon me. What earthly thing can save me?"

"Love can save you," he said.

"Love!—for *me!* Oh! you are speaking falsely; you are playing with me. I am not alive any longer. I have nothing to do any longer with human feelings and passions: I am dead. It is ghastly work playing with a dead woman!"

"O Viola, how can you torture me like this?"

"What do you mean? You shrink from me yourself. I saw the look in your eyes, and I know what has happened."

"You are horribly deceiving yourself; but I have no time now to try to convince you—don't you understand that we must go?" he repeated hoarsely, "and that I would die for you?"

She gave a heart-broken cry, pressing his hand hard and close to her lips. Then she thrust it aside and turned away.

He darted after her.

"I must go alone," she said, without looking at him.

"You are quite mad! Where will you go to? What will you do? I must, I *will* go with you."

She shook her head. "That cannot be," she said. "You would see it yourself to-morrow. You think me mad, but I understand better than you do how things are. We stand facing one another to-night; but there is a deep gulf between us, and it will widen and widen, so that your voice cannot reach me—even now I hear it as a whisper; you will be cut off from me utterly and forever. It is quite just and it is unalterable. We must bid one another farewell." She moved away, covering her face as she passed the motionless figure on the floor.

Harry let her close the door behind her; but after waiting for a few seconds, to avoid her opposition, he followed her.

She had gone out by the side-door on to the terrace, and was hurrying, in the glimpses of the moon, along the narrow pathway that ran in and out by the winding cliffside, and finally up to the distant headland and the ridge or hill on the highest point of the downs which marked from here the western horizon.

Though she moved swiftly, he overtook her almost at once. Hearing his step, she looked back and waved him peremptorily away. But he disobeyed her. "You must not come with me; *indeed* you must not. Do not let your life entangle itself further with mine. I implore—I entreat you to go back. Let me think, hope, believe that you are not involved in this fate and this curse."

"Viola, you don't know what love means. You don't understand that it can save and atone and protect from the direst curse that ever fell on human soul. In this black hour

—which in truth *I* have brought upon you—am I to desert you? Can you ask it? It was all my fault, and you must let me save you."

"You would do this out of pity," said Viola, "out of self-accusation; you would ruin yourself to atone for all the love that you have showered upon me, all the risks that you have run for me, all the opportunities that you have sacrificed for me. O Harry! do you not see that my one remaining hope and desire is to turn away from you the shadow of this doom?"

"But, my darling, we can turn away the shadow together. Whatever you think you ought to do in expiation, I will try and help you to do."

"Ah! but if you were with me I could not expiate my crime; I should live enjoying the fruits of it—no, no, nothing can undo, nothing, nothing—and if we had eternity to work in! Go back to your own life; we are parted now; no power can prevent it. My punishment is sure, whether it come from man or from God. Love itself cannot help me now: I am beyond salvation. I am a lost soul, and every effort at rescue only makes my punishment the harder. Your love, in spite of all, has been the best and sweetest thing in my life. Don't you see how it will be its crowning misery, if you force me to drag you down with me—if I have to think of myself to the last as your evil genius, who from beginning to end has brought you sorrow and pain and misfortune? I have no faith and no hope; if ever a soul was lost, mine is that soul. Something within me seems to have frozen; I don't hope—I don't fear—and I don't repent." There was a strange light in her eyes as she recalled the terrible scene in the death-chamber. Repentance seemed to be as far from her thoughts as hope itself.

"Whatever happens, I must come with you," said Harry doggedly.

"You might just as well take some creature out of her grave," said Viola. "I am dead; I am quite dead. The only thing that makes me alive again—through sheer anguish—is the terror that you will not leave me, that I shall yet bring some crowning misery upon you. If you have any pity for me, let me go!"

"But what will you do? Where will you take refuge?"

"No matter, no matter; only let me go!" and she moved on, signing to him not to follow.

Harry stood grief-stricken and desperate. His face was drawn and haggard almost beyond recognition. It was all his fault, all his fault! What in Heaven's name ought he to do? Should he let her go, and return to take the punishment of her deed upon himself? If he did that, she would come back and give herself up; if he did not——

He saw her hastening away from him towards the distant headland, across the stretches of the downs, and his heart

leapt up in wild rebellion against her decree of banishment. It was more than man could endure. He would not endure it.

Swiftly as she was moving, he soon gained upon her, the sound of the sea and rising wind preventing her from hearing him until he stood before her and uttered her name. Then she gave a miserable cry and stopped abruptly.

"Viola, your command is unbearable. I cannot leave you. It is not pity, it is not remorse that moves me; it is love—sheer desperate undying love. I will share your fate, whatever it may be, and glory in it."

A quiver passed across her face, as if she were verging towards the realms of the living once more. But she shook her head.

"You think only of the moment; you don't foresee as I do."

"I do foresee, and I foresee a means of easy escape to-night, if only you will be reasonable, if only you will be merciful. Beyond that headland, beyond the ridge of the downs, there on the horizon, Caleb's boat—as I told you—is lying moored and ready for our flight."

"It is of no use; it is of no use," said Viola.

"It *is* of use," cried Harry, thinking she meant that the proposed means of escape were hopeless. "Listen. Sibella and Caleb have arranged that the boat shall be waiting for us in that little inaccessible beach in order to avoid the risk of being seen or our means of flight suspected. Beyond that ridge you come abruptly—if you keep near the sea—to the western wall of the promontory, the place where the man rode over in the dusk and broke his neck. If we skirt the cliff close by that spot, and don't mind keeping pretty near the edge for another two miles—it is considered dangerous, for the cliff is breaking away in places, so we shall be absolutely secure from meeting anybody—if we take this slight risk we shall reach the boat in about twenty minutes, whereas we might take an hour to go round by the safer way. I am not a bit afraid if you trust yourself absolutely to my guidance. But this is not all (Viola, you *must* let me show you what our chances are before you reject them). Two miles along the coast, beyond the headland, Caleb discovered a part of the cliff which would have offered an easy descent had it not been for one steep little bit about midway, which was unscalable. It struck him that a few artificial steps cut in the rock would make it continuous with the slopes above and below, where one could scramble down without much difficulty. He made those few steps (Viola, hear me to the end), and now we can descend by this way to the beach and put off to sea. Do you see how many advantages that gives us? Nobody but ourselves, Caleb and Sibella know of the possibility of getting to that beach from inland; the cliff is thought unscalable for miles in that direction; our means of escape, therefore, will never be suspected until some chance

adventurer discovers Caleb's steps. The course that we shall take will be quite different from any that their calculations could lead them to expect. Long before morning we shall be out of sight, and we shall have landed on French shores before they think of pursuing us by sea. Sibella and I had formed careful plans for our guidance after we reached the opposite coast (you know that she was to help us and stand by us wherever we went), and these—but I must tell you about them afterwards—I have no doubt whatever that I could save you, if you would only trust yourself to me and do as I ask you. Every moment is of value; I do not feel safe till I have left the land behind me. Come, darling, come."

He put his arms round her to draw her away, but she resisted him.

"Viola, Viola, for my sake come." His voice shook with the passion of his pleading. "Remember how madly I love you!" His lips were white and trembling, his eyes filled with tears.

She held her breath, wrestling with the might of the temptation to yield to his pleading, to seek rest and refuge in the eager arms encircling her, to lay her head on his breast and drift back to life once more, love-bestowed and tended. After the long conflict and self-suppression, after the gloom and grief and pain of her life, the thought of such surrender and protection was like heaven! The longing became so intense that she had to clench her hands and stand still and rigid in order to resist it. She must not, she *would* not yield to it; she must not, she *would* not inflict upon him this deadly injury. Murderess as she was, she had not the baseness to accept a joy, to seek to avert a punishment at his expense. There was no room for self-deception; it was as clear as noonday. It must not be. If she had to face the torture of wounding him now, when she must bid him farewell for ever, still the torture must be faced—even *his* torture, in order that he might be saved.

Harry was still desperately pleading, Viola with her hands clasped tightly, her eyes fixed on the clouds, resisting, refusing, entreating him to leave her.

"Don't look away from me like that, Viola!" he cried wildly. "What have I done that you should treat me so? It will drive me mad!"

He fell at her knees sobbing. She steeled herself for the terrible moment.

"Good-bye! good-bye!"

In a moment she had darted from him, swift as an arrow. He sprang up and followed her along the cliff-side pathway. She was running with desperate haste, on and on towards the distant promontory. He was determined to keep her in sight whatever befell, though he thought it wise to seem to yield to her wish in the meantime. The moon was not yet high in

the heavens, and the undulations and hollows of the downs cast great stretches of shadow, made yet more sombre by the groups of gorse-bushes, and here and there, farther inland where the slopes were more sheltered, by patches of wood and little wind-beaten copses.

What did Viola mean to do? Which direction would she choose? At present she was keeping along the edge of the cliff where the moonlight fell, as if bound for the distant ridge on the headland. She was in sight, and so far safe. But presently she must come to one of the great patches of shadow, and then a serious danger threatened. The shadows ran into one another, some spreading inland, some towards the ridge, some back to the castle and the country about Upton.

When once she left the moonlit spaces, Harry would lose sight and knowledge of her unless he kept close beside her at the moment of her disappearing into the darkness. That peril must be avoided at all hazards.

His heart stood still at the thought of what might happen if he let her out of his sight. If she did not fling herself over the cliff, she might wander about the downs till morning, to be then hunted as a murderess and brought back for the hideous ordeal. She had no thought of evasion or self-protection.

He quickened his pace, till he was close enough to the fugitive to overtake her if necessary in a few seconds.

She seemed to become aware of his presence, for she turned and waved him frantically away. At a short distance ahead of them, crossing their path, lay the broad mass of shadow which Harry regarded with so much dread. He dared not obey her gesture; the risk was too great. When he came up to her she looked absolutely distraught.

"Now, Viola, I am coming with you," he said firmly; "you *shall* not keep me back. Realise that it is useless to attempt it."

In an instant she had gone up close to the cliff-side.

"If you advance a step beyond where you now stand," she said, "I throw myself over."

He stopped appalled.

They stood facing one another, between them the imaginary line upon the grass, stronger to oppose him, as Harry bitterly realised, than any fortress-wall. She stood on the very verge of the precipice, well out of his reach. His heart stood still for fear.

"Viola, you are pitiless as death!"

He heard her give a low sob as she moved swiftly away, keeping always close to the cliff.

His voice called despairingly after her, "Viola, have mercy on me—let me come!"

"I cannot, I cannot—it is because I love you."

"I *must* come!" he cried wildly.

She pointed silently over the cliff without looking back. In another second she had plunged into the shadow, and he could see her no more.

The blackness did not fall upon the edge of the cliff, and therefore Harry knew that she had left the perilous verge, and that he might pursue her. But which way had she gone? What did she intend to do? She seemed to be possessed with a feverish haste to cut herself adrift, to escape from the scene of so much misery. Hope sank within him as he ran on in desperate, clueless pursuit. The memory of her face and of her deed, her immovable firmness in spite of all his pleading, killed every vestige of it in his heart. It was almost worse than if she were mad. She was not mad—he had convinced himself of that; on the contrary, she was miserably sane, clear in her forecasts, in her grasp of the situation, in the certainty which she felt of hastening punishment. The notion of escape seemed to have no hold upon her; she would probably not deny her guilt if accused. Her one desire or necessity was to cut herself off from her fellow-creatures, even from those who would face all risks for her. She seemed to be thirsting for punishment, yet unrepentant.

Knowing that she had left the cliff's edge, Harry followed as swiftly as he could one band of shadow after another, faintly hoping to find the right one before Viola had time to evade him. But he could discover no traces of her. The shadows led away into the trackless downs and far into the country; it seemed hopeless to follow them at haphazard. All was dead and bleak and silent.

Surely she could not have gone back towards the castle or the village! That was the only shadowed route still unexplored. In the inland direction the quest seemed absolutely futile. There were belts of trees and hedgerows, and thick copses offering shelter,—besides that of the darkness,—for a dozen fugitives.

Harry went hopelessly on, looking on every side, listening and watching intently. The breaking of a twig, the stirring of a leaf, made his heart beat feverishly.

Time passed, and he saw no living creature, except occasionally a bird startled from its rest; heard no sound but the movement of the tree-tops and the never-ending murmur of the sea.

More than an hour had gone by in this heart-wearing search, and all in vain. Once, had he but known it, he passed quite close to Viola as she lay hiding in the outskirts of a large wood, well out of sight among the thick undergrowth. She had heard her pursuer's footsteps along the road, and crouched down till he should pass by. She heard him come up, look this side and that, pause and listen intently. She thought that he must hear the wild beating of her heart. She clenched her hands to prevent herself from crying out to him. Then she heard the footsteps pass on, and a voice through the tree,

came floating back to her in heart-broken entreaty, calling her name.

Her plan had succeeded admirably—absolutely; but oh, how mournful was the victory!

The sound of the footsteps, pausing at intervals and then going on again, was dying away now in the distance. She could just hear herself being called by the beloved voice for the last time.

"Viola, Viola!"

Then only the winds could be heard lamenting, and the trees whispering in sheltered tumult.

Viola flung herself on the carpet of dead leaves and broke into a passion of sobbing. The paroxysm, long and terrible, passed over at length, and left her lying still and exhausted at the foot of the old beech-tree where she had fallen. The wind, passing on its way through the wood, mourned over her. She rose at last, and pushed her way out. With one long, last look in the direction which Harry had taken, she turned again seawards, retracing her steps and hurrying back to the shelterless downs. She directed her steps—sometimes walking very quickly, sometimes breaking into a run—towards the headland and the ridge on the western horizon. A great sweep of moonlit down led up to it. Here were no shadows, for the land rose in a long series of gentle undulations to the height.

Across this wide space Viola was hastening when Harry, hopeless with the failure of his inland quest, returned once more to seek her by the sea. He knew her love for it, and the fascination of its voice, and he thought that in this desperate hour it would perhaps lure her back to the cliff-side and the shore.

His conjecture proved true. When he descried the dim figure in the distance hurrying towards the headland, he gave a wild cry and raced madly after her, dazed with new hope and frantic with fear. Over the brow of that hill lay the western wall of the promontory, sheer and pitiless; would she remember and avoid it? Could he overtake and shield her from the peril? One thought brought relief to him: though the fatal cliff lay beyond the ridge, the boat lay beyond it also, and Viola knew of it. It seemed not improbable,—it was even likely that she would set herself adrift upon the waters, giving herself to the sea, and accepting without question its final inexorable verdict. Harry raced on.

A lost spirit indeed she looked, moving, unconscious of pursuit, across those bleak spaces, swiftly as if the west wind were driving her before it in scorn. Harry's speed was marvellous; the ground seemed to devour itself beneath his feet. And as he ran the stern, terrible words which Sibella had so often quoted were rhythmically ringing, clear and hard as a peal of bells, in his memory: "But the goat on which the lot for Azazel fell shall be presented alive before Jehovah, to

make atonement with him, to let him go to Azazel in the wilderness." Reaching the brow of the hill, the figure turned to look for the last time on the scene which held so many memories.

The dark outline was revealed against the sky, motionless, alone.

What feelings were in her heart as her eyes rested upon that stretch of shadowed, wind-haunted country?

The old familiar moan came up on the gale from the sea. How did it strike upon her ear to-night? Did she remember that by to-morrow her name would be in everybody's mouth, scorned and execrated? Did she realise that the hand of every man—except one—would be against her; that she was homeless, well-nigh friendless, with a hideous ordeal threatening, and a terrible death?

"What have I done? Oh! what have I done?"

The last flicker of hope died out; not a spark remained; there was no possible redemption. Harry saw that she was indeed doomed by fate, by circumstance, by temperament; that she was beyond the reach of salvation, even as she had said. Love itself stretched out faithful arms in vain. She could not even repent.

In the sky a phalanx of black clouds had been marching up stealthily from the west, so thick and heavy that the moonlight was threatened with extinction. Becoming suddenly aware of this danger, Harry darted forward in a panic. If the moon were covered before he saw which direction Viola had taken he would lose her again, and this time assuredly he would lose her for ever. He had to race the clouds. But he had no chance against them: he saw that clearly, with an awful pang of renewed despair, as he nevertheless put forth his utmost strength, and tore and strained, and struggled madly up the hill. The terrible effort seemed to rend him; he could not breathe; he was unable even to gasp; he felt rigid, paralysed. But he struggled on as one possessed. In a miraculously short time he had covered half of that inexorable space, but it was not within the power of man to reach the summit in the time. The strain was too much for him; he faltered, staggered, and half fell against the hillside; trying to drag himself up even then with his hands, his head spinning, a rush of blood filling his mouth. At that instant the solitary figure, with one last look over the moonlit country and the sea, with one glance upwards at the sky, passed over the brow of the hill and out of sight, while a second later the sombre procession swept over the face of the moon and plunged the whole landscape in darkness.

The scene was obliterated: darkness everywhere; over the interminable uplands, in their profound solitude, in the shrouded heavens, and over the sea: pitch-black, rayless, impenetrable darkness.

THE END.

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